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THE GREEN SHADOW

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS.



THE BEAUTIFUL FIEND COWED BEFORE THE DANGER.

The Green Shadow;

OR,

Helene Cercy, the Beautiful Tigress.

The Romance of the Fatal Star
of Diamonds.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRESENCE OF THE SHADOW.

A STORMY night in the City of Philadelphia.

Vivid lightning darted across the black skies, and loud thunders pealed in the throat of the hurtling wind.

The flood-gates of heaven seemed opened on the earth, and the streets were deserted in the fierce hissing of the rain-torrents.

We enter a house of imposing architecture, situated on Walnut street near —.

Evidence of wealth glittered on every hand; and the brilliant jets of the chandelier hid, from those within, the fire-tongues of electric fluid.

In the parlor, walking slowly to and fro, with head hung, and brow slightly darkened by a frown, was a woman of transcendent loveliness, attired in costly raiment and weighted with jewels.

She was excited by thoughts that just then trained through her mind; anon she would pause, fold her bare spotless arms and pat impatiently on the smooth skin with her gemmed fingers. Her red lips were tightly compressed; her large eyes—black as midnight, lustering as diamonds, and shaded by long, silken lashes—sparkled with unwonted brilliancy, and her bosom rose and fell with short respirations.

In the doorway stood another female—a servant. Her face was white, her eyes staring; she watched the movements of her mistress in silence.

The presence of the latter was not known till presently the beauty caught sight of a white skirt, and she faced the girl angrily.

"Well, what are you doing there?" she demanded.

"Nothing, madame."

"Nothing! Then begone—"

"But, madame—"

"To your room! Do you not see that I am troubled? I would be alone. Begone, I say."

"But, madame, hear me—"

"Hear you?"

"I dare not retire. Oh, madame!"—casting a quick, fearful glance along the entry, and stepping into the parlor—"I have been terribly frightened. I cannot retire."

"Ah! frightened?"

"Yes—I am weak, sick; I could not go to my room now; I—"

"You have seen something?" interrupted her mistress, inquiringly.

The girl looked again toward the hall, and drew further from the door.

"I say you have seen something," reiterated the beauty, advancing and grasping the wrist of her servant.

"Oh, madame! I fear that there is some fearful mystery working here. Yes, I have seen something—but, don't look at me that way! You seem mad, crazed—"

"Mad or not, I am myself, Helene Cercy, your mistress, and I command you to speak. Tell me what you have seen?"

"A spirit of some kind, a frightful shape that has iced the blood in my veins," she answered, shuddering.

"A spirit! Ha! ha!—yes; go on. Go on, Eloise! You have seen a spirit! I knew that."

"You knew it, madame?"

"Did I not say so? Now, what did it look like?"

"One color of green, madame, from head to foot, with gleaming eyes, and a voice that laughed at me. It was like a maniac's screech."

"Yes—yes, a laugh like the screech of a maniac! I heard that, too. But, its face, Eloise? Tell me—you saw its face?"

"Madame, it had none."

"Yes—it had none; so you did not see it. This thing without a face, yet with eyes, with voice—what is it? Where did you meet it?"

"On the stairs leading to the kitchen," with a shiver.

"Yes, on the stairs leading to the kitchen. What more?"

"It came upon me suddenly, madame—"

"Yes—suddenly—as it always does—this shadow of green, this demon shape without a face, yet with eyes, and a voice, and—But I am waiting. Why do you not go on? I would know more. You saw it on the kitchen stairs—what then?"

"Then, when it laughed so horribly in my ears, it fled toward the kitchen, madame."

"And vanished?"

"Yes, it disappeared—"

"Through the wall!—up the chimney!—under the floor!—vanished in air! Am I not right?"

"I could not tell, madame; as soon as I could find strength, I ran hither."

A deep silence ensued.

Helene Cercy was thinking. The girl, keeping close to her, still trembled, still glanced uneasily into the dark shadows that filled the hall without.

"Eloise."

"Yes, madame."

"This thing has followed me now for fifteen years."

"Fifteen years!" repeated the girl, in surprise.

"I said fifteen years. This shape of green, with staring eyes and strange laugh, yet faceless, has hovered nigh me, wherever I have been—dogging in my path, terrifying me by its hidden significance. It confronts me only in the night. I have met it in the street at my door; it has come to my bedside, to break my slumbers; it has, sometimes, been at my heels when I ascend or descend the stairs. Who or what is it, I know not. But, I hate it!"

"It is a dreadful phantom, madame."

"Not so, for it has the voice of a human. It has a hard grip, too; I have felt it—once at my throat, as if it meant to choke me. Ugh!" and with a convulsive tremor she resumed her restless striding over the soft carpet.

The maid watched her, wondering why this almost unearthly shadow had followed her mistress for fifteen years. What had Helene Cercy done in the past that she should be cursed by the presence of so singular an apparition?

As if she divined the thoughts of the girl, Helene wheeled suddenly and went up to her.

"Eloise"—very slowly, "I want you to believe me when I say I have never been guilty of anything to warrant this curse of hauntment. My sleep is broken at night, my peace of mind is disturbed when awake. Why it should be so, I cannot tell you. At one time I felt as if I should die, so great was the tax on my nerves. But, I lived through; and now, I am self-resigned to what is a feature to be borne in my existence." Then abruptly: "Do you fear it?"

"Fear it?"

"Yes. Would you leave my service through horror of having to encounter it continually?"

"Do you fear it, madame?" asked the girl, after a moment.

"You shall see," was the reply, while the dark orbs flashed anew. "I am going to discover, if I can, what this goblin is."

"And—"

"And then rid myself of it. Will you aid me?"

"Aid you? I?"

"Come with me to the cellar."

"Madame!"

"To the cellar. It is a human being, and it is a woman. We are two women. We can match it, should we meet it. Come."

"But, madame, the danger—"

"Pah! what danger? For fifteen years I have been a prey to its ghostly habits—now I am determined to fathom the mystery. I have noticed that it always disappears toward the cellar. Let us go down there. Come."

Helene, nerving herself to carry out her resolution to solve the mystery, and clenching her jeweled fists to strike in case they met the object, stepped out into the entry.

Instantly she recoiled, and simultaneously a loud, strange laugh echoed through the house, penetrating their ears with cutting sharpness.

"See!" she cried. "Eloise!—see there. The shadow!"

Eloise hastened to the side of her mistress, and beheld the thing fleeing along the broad hall, till it vanished in the gloom at the head of the basement stairs.

"See, Eloise! it goes again toward the kitchen."

"I see, madame."

"Get the lamp from the bracket on the first landing. Be quick. We will follow it closely."

Eloise went for the lamp; though it was evident she had no heart in the determination expressed by her mistress.

When the lamp was lighted, Helene led the way. Eloise followed, timidly.

Down the stairs, through the basement rooms, across the kitchen, finally, into the cellar, from whence issued a draught of cold air, as they swung open the door.

"Come, Eloise."

They entered, and glanced searchingly around.

It was a damp and dismal place. Spider-webs hung thick from the moldy joists, and the flame of the wick formed spectral shades in the niches and round numerous boxes.

All was still and ominous; no sight save the startled rat that glided noiselessly into its hole at their approach, no sound but the faint patter and wash of the rain and rumbling of the thunder.

"Madame," whispered the girl, "let us go back. There is nothing here."

"Pah! you are superstitious," exclaimed Helene, still casting about the tomb-like cellar, and waving the light above her head. "Perhaps it is superstition, madame, but call it anything, it is the same: I am afraid to stay here."

"Ha!—do you hear that?"

A terrific peal of thunder shook the house to its foundations.

Suddenly Helene bent forward and gazed fixedly on a small soot-heap that had been thrown there the day before. Beyond the soot was an old barrel, and between the soot and the barrel she divided an eager scrutiny.

Eloise saw that she had discovered something.

"What is it, madame?"

"Do you not see? Look, Eloise: a footprint—two footprints."

"Yes."

"See how small. The foot of a woman—the foot of the shadow."

"Yes."

"The shape of green is underneath that barrel. We have found its hiding-place. At it, now!"

Helene advanced quickly and grasped the barrel by its head.

But the maid drew further away, as if dreading the result of their attempt to discover the identity of the Green Shadow.

"Now then!"

Helene overturned the barrel, sending it whirling across the earth floor, and displaying a strength in her round, white wrist that seemed incredible.

But no phantom, nor aught else, rewarded the act. Instead, there was exposed to view a square aperture in the stone foundation, of, at least, two feet in diameter.

And over this she stooped and held the light, while Eloise stared.

In the same moment, an unexpected sound startled them—the clang of the door gong. The noise reverberated harshly, and was followed by another crash of thunder.

"The door!" Helene exclaimed, breathlessly, and the girl repeated after her, echoing:

"Who can it be? Who would come here in such a storm?"

"I will see, madame."

Glad to escape from the gloomy cellar, she made haste to answer the summons.

The comer was impatient, for, ere she reached the head of the stairs the bell sounded again.

Helene heard the front door open and shut; then a step—the step of a man—who, she knew, was entering the parlor.

Presently Eloise returned.

"Who is it?"

"A gentleman to see you, madame."

"A gentleman?"

"Yes—"

"What can he want?—that he should

come through this storm, and at such an hour! It is near midnight."

"That I cannot say; but—"

"Do you know who he is?" interrupted Helene, in wonderment.

"I do not know him, madame; but here is his card."

"Ah! his card."

Glancing at the card, she let it fall, and stared blankly.

"Cortez Mendoza!" burst from her lips, in a gasp of astonishment—the name that was upon the card.

"And he is now up-stairs?—comes to see me?" as if in doubt.

"Yes, madame."

Recovering from her surprise, she held the lamp toward her companion.

"Take this. I will see Cortez Mendoza. He—here! Where did he come from?—the grave? A month ago I read that he was killed in a duel, or wine-brawl, in New Orleans! What does he come to me now for?—to measure weapons with me again? Let him try it!"

While thus speaking in a tone not intended for the hearing of the girl, she withdrew from the cellar and ascended the stairs.

Eloise kept close behind. Again she was wondering, and this time she asked herself:

"Why should the coming of this man, Cortez Mendoza, cause Helene Cercy so much surprise, cause her to mutter and scowl as if in anger? She knows him; I see that plainly. But she is far from pleased with his visit—that, too, I see plainly. See the frown on her brow! One of her fists is hard shut—she is biting her lip. It is strange."

But ere she concluded her surmising, Helene Cercy had entered the back parlor to the left of the hall.

Not wishing to be far away from company, while dreading the reappearance of the Green Shadow, Eloise extinguished the lamp, and went into the long *salon* opposite the back parlor, into which her mistress had disappeared.

Once inside the room Helene had dropped upon a sofa, greatly agitated, and evidently wrestling hard to overcome—what was it, fear, hate or thirst for revenge?

"Oh, why is he here now?" she murmured. "I thought that viper was out of my path, yet he is not dead; he is here to taunt and thwart me—if he can; but, I swear by my heart strings that he shall not triumph; I will kill him; he has pursued me only to meet his death!" and the beautiful woman looked, now, like a fiend, her fine face was so contorted with passion.

Then she sat quite still for awhile, as if to compose her nerves for the ordeal of the interview. At last she arose; stepped quickly to the dividing door, and, opening it, entered with a queenly mien to confront her visitor of ill-omen.

And we must go to another portion of the city, to make the acquaintance of this Cortez Mendoza, and ascertain something of his object in coming there, to the house of Helene Cercy, through the severe storm of the night and at so late an hour.

CHAPTER II.

MORE OF THE SHADOW.

It was a few hours earlier than when our story opens, that a man might have been seen walking rapidly down Chestnut street, having just emerged from the hallway of the Girard House.

There was no fall of rain, as yet, but an occasional flash of lightning, and the rumble of thunder in the distance, told that the storm was not far off.

The man whom we notice moved with a firm step, with a slight swagger of the shoulders, with eyes bent on alternate objects ahead.

Reaching a fashionable restaurant, below Eighth street, he ascended the steps, crossed the brilliantly-lighted bar, and entered one of the cozy rooms at the rear.

"Punch!" he snapped, at the attentive waiter, who stood behind an enormous mustache.

"Yes, sir; what kind?"

"No matter—punch!" with another snap; and as the waiter disappeared, the customer threw aside his hat, sending it, with a curl

and a quiver, squarely onto the opposite table—a broad, soft, black slouch hat, with a dented crown.

Then he settled himself with a grunt, and pulled leisurely at the ends of a long, silken, jetty mustache.

While he is waiting for his punch, we take a look at him—for it is Cortez Mendoza, whose unexpected visit to the large house on Walnut street, interrupted Helene Cercy and her maid, when they were about to explore the mystery of the gloomy cellar.

A Spaniard, as his name indicates; and a powerful one, for he had broad shoulders, a large hand, a general appearance bespeaking a more than ordinary muscular development. His face was very dark, with a few lines; a high forehead, thick brows, piercing eyes, dilating nostrils, and a set frown. His head was well shaped, with hair that was black, thinly grown, very long.

As he leaned comfortably back in the chair, one hand—doubled to a huge fist—lay idly on the table, and the sharp, keen eyes rested on the carpeting.

Cortez Mendoza was thinking; and his thoughts ran this wise:

"So it is fifteen years ago, at last. Fifteen years of a dog's life—pain, anger, torture, curses, foaming. Malediction! Have I not nursed my hopes well? Yes—well. Helene Cercy would believe me dead. So. Yes, it pleased her to think that Cortez Mendoza died, or was killed in a fight, in New Orleans, a month ago. Ha! ha! but I am alive! She will be disappointed. I am here. Malediction!—yes, I am here. She shall see me to-night—and talk with me, hear me, ha! ha!—yes, Cortez Mendoza is here, after fifteen years, for the answer you promised him. Ah! you've brought it? Set it down. Now go," the closing speeches to the waiter, who brought in the punch.

"Anything else, sir?"

"No."

"A crab?—nice crabs, sir—"

"Malediction! Begone!" striking the table with his fist in a way that made the castors rattle, the plates to dance, and the waiter to leave hurriedly.

When alone, Cortez growled to himself and turned to suck at the straws in the glass. He was soon thinking again, but no longer spoke aloud.

Suddenly a form stood in the doorway—a man, short in stature, thin, with gray eyes, smooth face, and wearing a tight-fitting cap. Cortez looked up. He saw that this party was scrutinizing him, and he returned the stare, half in surprise, half in anger.

"You are Cortez Mendoza," said the small man in a peculiar voice.

"Malediction! And who are you?—you gaping monkey!" and Cortez started from his chair.

But the stranger vanished toward the billiard-room.

When Cortez reached the door, no one was to be seen.

"Malediction on him! Who is it? He says, 'You are Cortez Mendoza;' and then—fizz-z!—he is gone! He knows me well. But who is he? What did he mean by that? Ha!" the closing exclamation as a hand touched his shoulder, and he turned to confront an aged negro.

It was not one of the servants of the establishment, for, at sight of him, Cortez said:

"Farak! Now then! what are you doing here?"

"Master," returned he called Farak, hurriedly, bowing his white-haired head, and pausing in his speech.

"Tell me, Farak—did you see a monkey-of-a-man dart out from here this minute?"

"I did not, master."

"Death catch him! He has made me nervous," Cortez muttered. "If I had him in my fingers I could wring his head off! But, what are you doing here? Did you follow me?"

"I was seeking you, master," replied the negro, in a very low yet very even and distinct tone.

"And for what? Malediction! I shall lose my punch! Speak out, then!"

"Farak is sorry to displease you," he apologized; "but something has happened—"

"Ha!" Cortez leaned eagerly forward.

"Will you come back to the hotel?"

Farak was the servant of Cortez Mendoza; and, judging from the way in which he addressed the Spaniard, he must have been the latter's slave at one time, for the habit of using the word "master" still clung to him.

The negro had something to communicate—Cortez easily perceived this; and leaving the punch unfinished, he paid at the counter, and followed Farak from the place.

Though apparently well advanced in years, Farak's step was firm and elastic; and notwithstanding a perceptible bend in the back, there was an air of quiet dignity in his bearing, which years of servitude had not yet worn out.

When the two were in their apartment, at the hotel, Farak closed the door, then pointed toward the bureau, where, sticking in the frame at one end of the mirror, was a neatly-folded note.

"Ha! what's that? A note!—who from?" striding forward to the bureau.

"I cannot say who it is from, master—"

He was interrupted by a sharp cry that issued from the Spaniard's lips.

"Malediction! See—it is addressed in green! Green ink, Farak!"

"I see, master."

But the negro did not look at it. He was standing respectfully to one side, his head bowed and body bent, while the first was bobbing slightly with the nervousness of his years.

Cortez stared at the note for a second, then snatched it from the frame, and tore it open—to cry out instantly:

"Malediction! Look at this! It is written in green ink, and it says: 'Cortez Mendoza is not so safe as he supposes himself to be. He may fly from ocean to ocean, or north, or south; but the curse of his deeds shall follow him swiftly, and the Green Shadow will haunt him to the grave!' Ho! Farak—do you hear? *Caramba!* You hear what it says? It will dog me to my grave—haunt me forever! Is it not pleasant—ha! ha!—to be followed by something you cannot see?—something that writes letters, that uses green ink, that has made my life miserable for fifteen years! Ha! ha!—yes, it's pleasant. I rather like it! Laugh, Farak—laugh!" and Cortez ground his teeth savagely, pulled hard at one end of his mustache, and worked the fingers of his disengaged hand, as he gazed on the mysterious note which had fluttered to his feet.

Farak saw that his master was being consumed by the fiery thoughts and passion aroused by what he had just read. The dark face of Cortez Mendoza had turned to an ominous pallor, and his eyes, dancing, flashing, as they fixed upon the significant missive, were protruding in their sockets.

"Master—"

But the Spaniard wheeled upon him with a hiss.

"How did you come by this?—when?—who gave it to you?" rapidly.

"It was soon after you went out, master, that some one knocked at the door—knocked very hard—"

"Yes, 'some one knocked at the door,'" repeated Cortez, twirling his mustache by jerks.

"I answered," continued Farak, "and saw there a very short man—"

"A short man!" echoed Cortez.

"Very thin—"

"Very short and thin!" broke in the Spaniard again, now pulling at both ends of his mustache, rocking from heels to toes, while his white teeth glistened behind the lips that he dragged apart.

"His eyes were gray—"

"Yes—yes!" in a whining cry.

"And he wore a cap—"

"Ho! Malediction! it was he who came to the door, at the restaurant, and said: 'You are Cortez Mendoza!' If I had him now by the throat, I could choke him! May he die by the itch!" and the excited Mendoza, unable longer to stand still, sat down on the side of the bed, still wrenching away at his mustache, and swinging his limbs inward and outward with an opposite motion.

"Let that pass," he snarled, presently.

"Tell me more. You got this note from him?—the man who was short, thin, wearing a cap and—malediction!—with gray eyes. Eh?"

"Yes, master."

"Go on, then."

"He said that you had gone—"

"That I had gone!"

"To a restaurant, below Eighth street."

"*Caramba!* it is cat and mouse—I am the mouse! Well?"

"That I must go after you, and bring you to the letter—"

"Ho!—me to the letter—not the letter to me! Good. You have done so. Well, what else from this man with a cap?—death catch him!"

Cortez Mendoza now sat still. His limbs had ceased their motion; he had quit pulling his mustache, holding the ends at their greatest length, with his elbows elevated; and his eyes seemed about to jump from beneath the lids, as they riveted and stared on Farak.

"He told me to whisper a name," answered the negro.

"Yes, yes—go on!"

"And that name was—"

"Yes, 'that name was.' Be quick. You are to whisper a name. What is the name?—malediction! out with it."

"Carline Mandoro—"

"Speak it again, and I shall kill you!" roared Cortez, leaping from the bed, in a new frenzy of excitement, and shutting his jaws with a force that made his teeth crack loudly together.

He grasped the negro, and raised one muscular arm on high to strike him, while his eyes fairly flamed, and his teeth grated harshly.

But old Farak did not wince; he only bowed lower and stood humbler before his irritated master.

And at that juncture a vivid flash of lightning broke the gloom without, seeming to dart into the apartment and play around them. This was followed by a terrible crash of thunder; and Cortez shuddered, despite himself, as he paused.

"The storm has come, master," said Farak, calmly, turning, as he spoke, to draw the curtain before the windows.

The speech roused the Spaniard, and he began to stride back and forth across the room, twisting his hands and fingers till the knuckles snapped, and frowning darkly over the thoughts that then possessed him.

At last he addressed Farak, who was near the heavy curtains, peering out at the havoc of the tempest.

"Get me a cab," was the blunt, snappish order.

"You will not venture out in this storm, master?"

"A cab, I say! Do you hear?"

"But, it is not safe. See the lightning—and there! such thunder, too. It deafens us. We have not had so dire a blast for many summers."

"Malediction! am I to be dictated to? A cab—you dog!"

Farak bowed, and withdrew to execute his master's order. Ere long he returned; and Cortez, picking up his hat, started toward the door.

"What number is the cab?"

"Forty-seven."

"Good."

When about to pass out, Cortez paused, as if with a sudden thought.

"Farak—I am going to No. — Walnut street."

"It is the house of Helene Cercy."

"It is. You know her nature well."

"She is a dangerous woman, master; and I fear for you."

"Bah! I am her master. I do not fear her; though she is cunning, she would dare a great deal to be rid of Cortez Mendoza."

"Would it not be wise to take Farak with you?"

"No—remain here. But, look now: she may stab me, or shoot me; she may trap me in some way, though she does not expect to see me. She is quick, like the devil at shrewdness, and hates me. She is strong, too—malediction!" shrugging his shoulders with the recollection of some scene in the past which caused him to speak of Helene Cercy's physical strength.

Then he added:

"If I do not come back to-night, Farak, remember your oath."

"I will not forget, master."

"Good," and, with the word, he left the room, closing the door with a bang.

The note, written in green ink, and of mysterious contents, lay at a far side of the apartment, where Cortez Mendoza had kicked it during his recent excited walk up and down. When his master was gone, Farak secured this.

A brief glance at the negro. He wore an intelligent look; his forehead was massive; his dark eyes shone brightly on a ground of milky white. For one of his years, his teeth were remarkably sound; his lips were not too thick, nor was his nose too broad. His ebon features were not unpleasantly molded; his voice was wonderfully calm-toned; and we see that his language was free from grossness.

While he read the green lines on the small sheet, he nodded his woolly head, and muttered:

"Cortez Mendoza, you have shrewd enemies. This writer of letters is playing with you. For fifteen years you have tried to escape from something that you cannot see, yet which dogs you and threatens you. You have called Farak a cur, a hound, an ass, a fool, and a rascal by turns; you have even kicked him. Yet I will be faithful. If I can find the author or your unrest, I will be glad. I have been your slave since you were a child, and your life is part of mine. You have much to answer for—deeds of violence and wrong. But that is not my business. I have been, and am now, your slave; and were you Satan himself, I would be true to you. For you have educated me, and made me more than the most of my race. But what is this Green Shadow? What means it? There must be one act in the life of Cortez Mendoza that Farak does not know of—an act to bring upon him some deep curse, with a burning brain to rob him of many a night's repose. And what has Carline Mandoro to do with it? Who is Carline Mandoro, that mention of her name should make a tiger of my master, Cortez Mendoza, and set him to foaming at the mouth with passion?"

He read and re-read the note, continuing his soliloquy, and wondering what it was Cortez Mendoza had done, in the past, that he should be haunted, that he should receive such missives—for this was not the first time the Spaniard received a note written in green ink; but, for fifteen years, they had occurred at regular intervals, and at various places in the United States, their contents being pretty much the same.

But it would appear that Cortez had attempted to elude these hidden enemies lately, and the letter in familiar ink was to warn him of the failure of his plan. What that plan was will be developed, with other important features, during the progress of our work.

We follow Cortez Mendoza.

He had no sooner reached the hallway, near the door of the hotel, than he paused short, and exclaimed:

"Malediction! look!"

For directly in front of him was the small man who wore a cap, who had first delivered the note to Farak, and afterward stared at Cortez as the latter sat sucking his punch at the restaurant.

As soon as he saw the Spaniard had noticed him, the mysterious individual wheeled about and vanished.

Cortez dashed after him, venting an oath; but the object of his pursuit mysteriously escaped him.

"*Caramba!*" he growled. "If I once get him in my grip, I shall tear him to pieces! In New Orleans I was watched by a man—a very tall man; now I am dogged by a very small man, thin, with gray eyes, and—malediction!—who wears a cap. I must get rid of the small one as I did of the large one. Let me catch him once! Ho, there! driver? 47—where are you?"

"Here, sir; 47."

The cab which Farak had secured was speeding away westward from the Girard House, and Cortez Mendoza sat inside the vehicle, his face set in a sinister expression, which the continuous lightning-glare discovered.

The rain poured like a great torrent on the streets; the war of the elements seemed gathering fresher force each moment.

But the cab rolled on through it all; for

Cortez had agreed on a liberal fee to tempt the driver into a hazardous service that defied the bellowing gale.

Dismissing the cabman at the residence of Helene Cercy, Cortez rung the bell and stood close inside the door-frame out of the drenching rain.

"This storm will soon pass over," he thought, aloud, "else I would pay that rascal of a cabman fifty dollars to come back after me. Malediction! have they gone to sleep here? They shall let me in, if I must break the door down!"

Clang! clang! sounded the gong-bell, as he gave the knob another wrenching jerk.

Being shown into the front parlor, he seated himself and took a survey of his surroundings—twirling his mustache, and darting glances here and there, while he grinned forebodingly.

When Helene entered, he did not rise. He twisted and dragged the harder on the ends of his long mustache, alternately, with one hand; he contemplated her steadily, smiling grimly—a keen look, and a sardonic expression in his face; then crossed his limbs and swung one foot slowly inward and outward.

Helene's bright eyes flashed back his gaze; and it was plain that his presence was deeply disturbing to her, for her cheeks were crimsoned, and her pearly teeth were clinched, as if to keep back an outburst of passion and resentment that was rising to her lips.

"Cortez Mendoza," she said, pausing with the utterance of the name.

"Yes, it is Cortez Mendoza," with a spasmodic jerk of the swinging foot. "Yes," he added, the grin broadening, "it is Cortez Mendoza, come, after fifteen years, through fire, and—malediction!—with the scar of the assassin's knife on his bosom, to get the answer you promised. Your answer, Madame Helene Cercy."

Helene was breathing hard now, and vengefully.

CHAPTER III.

THE STAR OF DIAMONDS.

ADJOINING the house in which lived Helene Cercy was a residence of less attractive exterior.

It had long been a subject of curiosity among those residing in the immediate vicinity, and the cause of this we will explain briefly.

It had been just fifteen years since Helene Cercy purchased the handsome edifice in which she lived.

Three months subsequent to the purchase, the house next to it—the one of which we are speaking—was rented by two females, who had with them a girl-child not more than five years of age—apparently mother, daughter and servant.

After renting the house, and furnishing it, the trio retired to utter seclusion. No one was ever seen to issue from the building, except the servant, who, at regular intervals, procured provisions from the nearest stores.

Six months later, the house was bought at an enormous price by those occupying it; and then there appeared a silver plate on the front door, bearing in German text the name:

"CAOLO."

For ten years gossip waxed strong, and surmise was at fault; for no one had been able to make the acquaintance of these strange people who published their name as "Caolo."

Then a funeral occurred at this mysterious place—precisely ten years from the date of their moving in.

But even on this occasion the inquisitive were baffled; for no one, save the doctor and clergyman officiating, were admitted—and the latter personage disappeared when his duties were performed.

The doctor had been noticed during several visits which he made, prior to the appearance of crape on the bell knob.

As a consequence, the physician was besieged. But here the anxious ones met another defeat, for the medical worthy was not communicative even with those entitled to the highest consideration, and some of whom were among his own patients.

The people in the neighborhood never once slackened their zeal of wonderment; and this

received a fresh impetus when, a week or so after the singular funeral, a large, muscular negro, black as night, and well dressed, was observed on the steps, having just come out, and who presently moved leisurely off down the street.

This negro was seen frequently entering and emerging at the front door, adding, by his presence and actions, to the prevailing mystification, until parties were heard to exclaim:

"Caol! Caol! Who are these Caolos? Where did they come from? What are they doing here? Why do they exile themselves? What does their strange seclusion portend? Can we not get at them and bring them out of their hole?"

Thus matters stood, fifteen years after the first occupancy of the house by these people named Caolo—lacking three months.

And we call the reader's attention to those who lived there, on this night of storm when our story opens, five years after the funeral aforementioned.

In the second-story front room, seated in a large, comfortable, oddly-finished chair, was a girl of about twenty years.

Her eyes were large, dark, lustrous; her face oval, and colored in beauty. Her form was lovely as her face—the neck and arms displayed by a low-cut, short-sleeved suit of black; and over shoulders of extraordinary purity fell, like an ebon waterfall, masses of glossy black hair.

The apartment was furnished costily, and the girl seemed a queen in a sphere of her own creation.

Leaning against the mantelpiece was a woman quite advanced in years, for her hair was gray, and her face and form had perceptibly lost their roundness. She was silent, and watching her young companion.

The girl was, just then, looking at the dial of a watch which she held in one hand—her eyes seemingly closed beneath the drooping, silken lashes of jet.

"Zetta, it is time Gaeol were here. What can keep him?"

"The storm, perhaps," returned the woman.

"Ah! yes, it is a terrible storm. Hear the thunder!"

After a pause, the young girl asked:

"Are you sure Gaeol cannot be mistaken?"

"Yes, mistress."

"He has truly seen the diamonds?"

"He has seen the diamonds—seen the star for which you have searched so long, and for which your unhappy mother wept so ere she died."

"Do not speak of my mother again, Zetta; you make me sad. I have enough to make me remember her, without—the oath I uttered at her death-bed, when I was fifteen years old. But of the star of diamonds? How does Gaeol know but that this is only a chance representation of what we are seeking?"

"There can be no doubt, mistress. Gaeol knows, too, who sold the star to the pawnbroker."

"Who was it?"

"Cortez Mendoze."

"Ah! that Cortez Mendoze!"

"He sold it for \$500."

"And I am giving \$1,500."

"Is it not worth that to Zuelo Nanez?"

"Yes, it is worth twice as much to me. Hark! I thought I heard a step."

"It is Gaeol."

A heavy footfall was heard on the stairs, and in a few moments a huge African entered the room, glancing from one to the other of the two.

"Gaeol!" cried the girl; "have you brought it?"

"Yes; it is here," answered the comer, in a deep, guttural voice; and, as he spoke, he laid a small square ebon box in her lap.

With a quick motion she removed the lid.

"See, Zetta!—see! How beautiful!"

"I have seen it before, mistress."

"But I never have. Nor did I ever behold so many jewels in such splendor. Look! oh, look!"

She held up in the light of the room—glistening, scintillating, reflecting in magnificence—a perfect star, wrought of dia-

monds and gold inwoven and intermingled in a dazzling luster.

At sight of it Zetta shuddered and half-averted her face.

Gaeol, standing to one side—with muscular arms folded across his massive breast—looked on with the face of a stoic.

"Put it away," advised Zetta, with evident apprehension.

"Put it away!" repeated Zuelo; "why? I must look at it first. I want to see this star of diamonds, that my mother, that you and Gaeol, and I—all have hunted for so diligently during fifteen years. Even while I was yet a child, I remember my mother used to tell me that, if I outlived her, I must find this star of diamonds. I have never seen it until now, and I am curious."

"Mistress Zuelo," said the serving-woman, mysteriously, "though I am glad you have found this star, I am sorry, too."

"Sorry, Zetta? How you talk! What do you mean?"

"Better not to have found it, after all," put in Gaeol, in deep, impressive accents, that betrayed his feeling.

"Tell me what you mean?" demanded Zuelo, addressing both, but in the same breath she exclaimed:

"Ah, see this! Here is a name, Zetta! There is a name on the back of the star—'Carline Mandoro!'"

Again Zetta shuddered, and Gaeol moved nervously.

"Put it away, Zuelo—"

"No—come here to me! Tell me why you shuddered when I spoke that name? Why do you wish me to put away the star? Come here, I say!"

"Mistress"—Zetta advanced to her side, very solemnly, "it is better not to gaze on the thing too much. Let me beg of you to put it away."

"Not till you explain to me why you shuddered. Who is Carline Mandoro? Why is her name on the back of this star, when I was given to understand that it was always the property of my mother?"

Zetta now appeared to be more uneasy, and made a motion as if to thrust the star into the box.

But Zuelo Nanez was not to be put off in this way.

"Zetta, I command you to tell me why you are so worked upon by this jewel! What does it all mean? Speak, I command you!"

"Mistress, it is dangerous to possess it—dangerous even to look at it."

The voice of the serving-woman was unsteady, and there was a pained expression in her face.

"Dangerous to possess? Pouf!" scorn stamped on her beautiful face.

"Ay, but it is so, mistress."

"Yes," inserted the African, bluntly, "it is dangerous."

"But, why is it dangerous? Tell me that. It is my right to know."

"It has always been fatal to the one holding it, my mistress; and I wondered, while I dared not protest, that your mother should wish you to find it and keep it. I cannot understand."

"But, had my mother lived, she would have found it, and kept it?"

"True—she would," admitted Zetta; "but it is a fatal possession, my mistress, believe me. It has always brought trouble to its possessor—always!"

"Death sometimes," supplemented Gaeol.

For a third time, a trembling shiver crept over Zetta, whose pallid face showed her alarm.

"Put it away. Let me keep it. I will hide it; and then, perhaps, Zuelo Nanez may be saved from its evil spells."

"Evil spells? You talk like a crazy woman! No; I will keep it. Spells? Ha! ha! ha! I am not so superstitious. But, tell me—who is, or was, Carline Mandoro?"

After hesitating a moment, Zetta said:

"She was one of those who died because of possessing the jewel."

"So, Carline Mandoro, at one time, held this star of diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say that it caused her death?"

"Yes."

"How did she die?—in a fit? Was she drowned?—poisoned?"

"She fell by the hand of an assassin, mistress—she was stabbed."

The interruption came tremulously, and Zetta made another attempt to thrust the star into the box.

Zuelo herself could not prevent the chilly sensation which passed over her at the announcement. But she said, presently:

"Tell me more of this Carline Mandoro."

"We know no more," came quickly from the African.

"That is a falsehood! You are hiding something from me! Come, speak out. You are both sworn, of your own free will, to be faithful to me, and do my bidding. I command you to tell me more about this star—its history. And tell me, too, who Carline was!"

At that juncture the fancy-clock on the mantelpiece struck the half-hour after ten. Gaeol pointed toward it, and looked at his young mistress, while he said:

"The time is sounding. See—Zuelo Nanez must not forget her duty! The Green Shadow!"

Without a word, Zuelo arose and hurried from her room. But she carried the star of diamonds with her, despite the protestations of her anxious-faced serving-woman.

"It will be the death of Zuelo Nanez, as it was of others before her," Zetta said, slow and thoughtfully, and gazing toward the door through which her mistress had vanished.

"Yes, it is a cursed possession—a talisman of evil, wrought by the prompting of Satan," added Gaeol, also looking in the direction of the door.

CHAPTER IV.

MET AND MATCHED.

As Cortez Mendoze uttered the words signifying that he had not come upon an idle mission, he eyed Helene Cercy keenly, with a look of confidence in his dark face and a grim smile wreathing the corners of the sinister mouth beneath his long mustache.

"Cortez Mendoze, you are a brave man," she said, at length.

He bowed.

"Do you know what danger you are in?"

"Danger?" he repeated, elevating his brows, and molding his lips to a circle.

"Yes, danger. Your life is threatened."

"Malediction! No?"

"Ay, but you shall see, if you disregard what I say."

"And what is that?"

"Begone, instantly!"

"Ho! Begone, eh?"

"Go, sir, before you feel my claws—"

"The claws of a cat!"

"No matter. Go, now!"

"Bah!" he growled, shifting his position, "I am here on business—not to run away again. I am no fool."

"Beware!"

There was a strange light burning in the dark orbs that were fastened on her unwelcome caller.

"Beware! Of what?"

"Of me, Cortez Mendoze!"

"Of you! Hunh! I do not fear you—nor anything."

"Nothing?"

"Malediction! Nothing!"

"Not even the ghost of the murdered Carline Mandoro?"

"Caramba!" he shouted, half-starting up.

"Aha! you fear nothing, I see!—not even the ghost of Carline Mandoro. Ha! ha! ha!" and she laughed, mockingly, leveling a forefinger at him.

The Spaniard clinched his teeth and glared fiercely upon her.

"Leave off!" he hissed, viciously.

"I shall not! You fear the ghost of Carline Mandoro—it is plain; and why should you not? Ha! h—a! But, mark: you shall fear me far more than you fear the spirit of the dead. Do you hear? Begone, now, as you value your life!"

"No—malediction!" he snarled, striking his knee with his fist, "I will not go"—striking the other knee with the other fist—"until I make you understand that I do not fear ghost nor human!"

Then, beating on both knees, with both fists, after the manner of a pair of drumsticks, he leaned slightly forward, and spoke with rapidity:

"I am Cortez Mendoze. I fear nobody,

nor anything. I am here for your answer—malediction!—after fifteen years. You have not escaped me. You had best not try to do so again. You thought me dead. But, I am alive—*caramba!* yes, I am alive! I want your answer. Be quick! Malediction! I am Cortez Mendoza!”

“Beware, Cortez Mendoza! — beware!” came peculiarly from the tongue’s end of the baleful beauty.

“I will not! Your answer, Madame Helene Cercey—your decision, between three things, in my favor: first, your hand in marriage—”

“Preposterous!”

“Or half your fortune—”

“Never! Never!”

“Then, the Star of Diamonds! Ha! Where is the Star of Diamonds? Can you tell me that, Madame Helene Cercey?”

“I cannot. The Star was stolen from me fifteen years ago. But, ere this, the one who was the thief has died. The Star has always proven fatal to the possessor, if there was any truth in the story you told me, over fifteen years ago.”

“Not so!” he said, quickly.

“Not so?” she echoed.

“I know of one who had that Star during nearly all the last fifteen years. And he is alive! Malediction!”

“Then you know where the star is to be found?”

“No matter. I know that you speak the truth, when you say that you have not got it. Next: your fortune—”

“You shall have none of it!” defiantly.

“Ho! it is you who are brave now”—smiling in his grim, ironical way; “you are defying Cortez Mendoza. Do you not fear Cortez Mendoza? It is my turn now to say ‘beware!’ Beware how you trifle with Cortez Mendoza! I know how to deal with you, I think. Though I was deceived in you fifteen years ago. I will not be so now.”

“Take care!—take care!” panted Helene, while her jeweled fingers worked nervously, and she seemed about to spring upon the now defiant man.

“‘Take care’ yourself!” he retorted.

“The Star of Diamonds is lost. You will not give me half your fortune. So! Now then, the last alternative: your hand in marriage.”

“I would as soon wed a wolf!”

“Then there would be two wolves in the den. Malediction! You are a scratch-cat. But, you are a beautiful woman; you have money; you must be the wife of Cortez Mendoza! You dare not refuse!” and he sprung from his chair as he spoke—the center-table only between the angered man and the steely-eyed woman.

“No!” she cried, “but I may escape you. Take this!” and with the words she snatched a dagger from her bosom, and sprung forward with the blade glittering aloft—her face glowing, and the large, dark eyes afire with the emotions of hate and vengeance.

But, with lightning quickness, the Spaniard drew a revolver from his pocket, and leveled it at the head of the infuriated woman.

She cowed before the muzzle, and her features paled, for she saw that the weapon was cocked and ready, and only a slight pressure of the finger was necessary to end her life.

“Ah, vixen, tigress that you are, you would add to your crimes, would you, and put me out of your path. Bah! I have you at my mercy. Drop the knife! Quick!” and he pressed nearer the table, leant over it, his pistol arm extended.

The beautiful fiend cowed before the danger. She read in the Spaniard’s flushed face and flashing eyes his deadly intent, and threw the dagger hastily behind her to the floor.

“There, madame, that is well. It has saved your life,” Cortez cried. “Ah, but you are a dangerous woman, as you say. Yet I fear you not, for I am your master—do you hear, your master?” and he dropped back into the chair, a malicious, triumphant smile upon his still flushed face.

The defeated woman ground her white teeth together in her impotent rage. Momentary fear had given place again to deadly hate and vengeful purpose. He read that much in her mien of mingled defiance and hauteur as she stood well back from the table.

But, though now apparently unarmed as she was, the Spaniard was so fully convinced

of her treacherous nature that he kept a wary watch on her every motion and movement. She might have yet another dagger concealed in her dress somewhere, or a pistol, that he very well knew she could use with skill; so, while he slipped his revolver back into his sash, he was on the alert for her quickest act or further maneuvers for an advantage.

It was like two cobras, in their wariness, watching for an opportunity to make a quick leap and a fatal stroke.

The Spaniard again spoke:

“Now we will go back to our beef! *Caramba!* if you try that trick again, there will be somebody shot! Come—your fortune, or your hand. Decide, as you promised Cortez Mendoza you would a little more than fifteen years ago.”

Helene, now recovered from the chagrin attending the defeat of her evil purpose, the spirit of defiance rose anew and fierce.

“You shall have neither!” she cried, “and you may do your worst! If you think Helene Cercey fears you—wretch!—you are mistaken! O-h!” in a half-frenzied tone—“give me but one chance, Cortez Mendoza, and I will rid the world of a detestable villain!”

“Malediction! you tigress! That villain is Cortez Mendoza, I suppose?”

She made no return.

“But, look now!” he went on, “what if I were to kill you, this minute, eh, to save my life in the future?”

“Go on! go on!” patting the carpet with one foot, straightening those bare, white arms, as she clinched her fists, and breathing hard and fast through her dilating nostrils; “go on, sir! You have pistols, and an advantage. Give me one pistol, and fight me fairly, if you dare—here, in this parlor.”

“Malediction! Catch me at it! You would put a bullet in my back! No—none of that. You are not shrewd enough to beat Cortez Mendoza! But, enough! Come—you will not give me half your fortune, eh? You will not wed me, eh?”

“I would stab you at the altar!”

“*Caramba!* No doubt of it, if you got the chance! But you shall do one of the two things. Hark: what if I call upon the police, and say to them: ‘I can show you a woman that the authorities of New Orleans would be glad to get hold of? Why? Because it was she who bribed the father of Wart Gomez to do that which brought a curse upon his family, and afterward sent her tool on a journey to his master, the devil!’ Ho! Would not that be a good *denouement*? Excellent! And I will do it!”

“Do it, then!” she defied. “Go and tell your story. We shall fall together. For, ere the chains rattle on my wrists, I will say: ‘Behold! there is Cortez Mendoza; he, too, has something to account for, in the city of New Orleans! Ask him if he knows aught of Carline Mandoro! Let him tell you who she was, and what to him, and what became of her!’ Ha! ha! ha! you see, it is share and share alike. What will Cortez Mendoza answer, after I have told all, when the authorities question him regarding Carline Mandoro?”

“Fiends devour Carline Mandoro!” bel- lowed Cortez, again jumping from his chair.

He strode restlessly to and fro, pulling savagely at the ends of his mustache. But he kept beyond the reach of Helene Cercey, and watched her closely, notwithstanding his excited state of mind, for he saw that, as he rose to his feet, the beauty’s hand glided to her bosom, and he knew that she was grasping the hilt of another concealed weapon—probably a long keen stiletto.

As Cortez Mendoza started up, a vivid flash of lightning entered at the back window, half-blinding them, followed by a terrific clap of thunder, that jarred the room.

Involuntarily he stepped to this window, to draw the curtains.

“*Caramba!* What a flash! Why do you not keep your windows darkened in a storm like this? You may defy Cortez Mendoza, but you cannot defy the lightning. I— Ha!”

He wheeled suddenly as he detected the rustle of a dress and a quick step behind him.

And, none too soon! With incredible swiftness Helene had bounded toward him, her second dagger in hand; and he was just in time to grasp her wrist, and avert the deadly blow she aimed at him.

Simultaneous with this tableau, a loud, long shriek of terror rung through the hall, and Eloise, her face white in fear, came running in.

A dozen steps, and she sunk to the floor in a swoon.

“Malediction!” exclaimed Cortez, whose nerves rose on edge when the curdling scream penetrated his ears.

And then, as he glanced in the direction of the doorway:

“*Caramba!* Look!”

For he saw there a strange, startling apparition.

A female form, robed from head to foot in slim garments of green; and over the garments waved long hair, still greener, which fell below the waist. There were two glittering eyes fixed upon him, but the face had neither outline nor shape, being evidently covered by a skin of some kind, stained to a similar color with the clothes, and which hid the throat and bust.

One second the fearful thing stood there; then, with a laugh that was uncanny and wild, it vanished.

A half-cry, half-howl, issued from the Spaniard’s lips, and, casting off the grip Helene had fastened upon him, he dashed forward in pursuit of this human phantom, drawing a revolver at the same time.

As he passed beyond the doorway, something whizzed close to his ear. It was Helene’s dagger. And she knew well how to throw the blade, for it only missed its mark by an inch, and buried its point, quivering, in the jamb.

CHAPTER V.

PEDRO GOMEZ, THE GARDENER.

WE take the reader back to a period of fifteen years and a half, in order that we may bring out certain features and incidents that transpired at that time, which involve our characters already introduced, and which are materially essential to the proper development of our plot.

Our story now goes to New Orleans, to a date just fifteen years and six months prior to the occurrences set forth in the preceding chapters.

It was a warm day, in the early spring that comes to the Crescent City.

Situated on Esplanade street was a fine estate, the property of one Elsor Earncliffe, an American, who had resided there for many years, with no other family member than his child, whose name was Florose.

Florose was an acknowledged belle—eighteen years of age; a blonde; beautiful and accomplished.

Her greatest rival was a dark-eyed girl of about her own age, no less lovely, and whose name was Helene Cercey.

Society was equally divided in admiration of the two rivals; and Florose, who was gentle and amiable, easily contented herself with her share of the praises that devotees continually poured upon her.

But in the nature of the young Helene there was a latent envy, a jealousy that grew stronger each day, and finally merged into a passionate hate, when one of her admirers—apparently detecting her feelings, and disgusted with this evidence of a desire to grasp all the laurels—deserted the stool on which he was wont to kneel in homage to the belle of the dark eyes and queenly mien.

It was not the mere desertion which piqued Helene so sorely; but, at the next *soiree*, he was seen delighting himself in the merry voice, soft glances and pleasant smiles of Florose.

From that moment, Florose had a deadly enemy in the jealous Helene Cercey; and the latter vowed to strike venomously, both at the recreant—whose name was Dwyr Allison—and, at the beautiful Florose, who, unsuspecting of danger, ever greeted her rival cordially; and more, still held the handsome Dwyr Allison a captive.

But Helene Cercey’s hate, already dire enough, was undoubtedly augmented by the news—which her maid brought to her one day—that Dwyr Allison and Florose were betrothed.

And it was true. From an admirer, the young man had become a lover. The attachment was mutual; for, when he proposed she accepted him, and now they were happy in the mingling of their affection and the prospect of an early marriage *fete*.

It was noticed that Helene had lost much of her vivaciousness. She seldom laughed, as seldom even smiled, and if either, it was forced and feigned.

For now, when she saw Dwyer Allison the affianced husband of Florose, she discovered that she had loved the man, loved him still, and wished him once more at her side—not as admirer but as suitor.

With the combined feelings of love, hate and regret gnawing in her bosom, she cared little or nothing about the dazzle and glare of reception-halls, or for the throng that flattered her wherever she went.

Two things were constantly uppermost in her mind: her love for Dwyer, and her hate for Florose.

Such was the condition of affairs when we ask the reader's attention in this quarter—at a date fifteen years and six months before the opening of our story, on the stormy night in Philadelphia.

On this bright, sunny day, Pedro Gomez, the gardener who had charge of the floral and shade grounds surrounding the residence of Elser Earncliffe, was hard at work with his spade, and giving orders to three men who were under him in the management of the place.

While he worked, he hummed a Spanish love-song, and seemed very well contented with the fact that he was nobody but Pedro Gomez, the poor gardener.

While he hummed and worked and gave his orders, he did not observe that a woman had approached the iron railing, and was gazing in at him through the bronzed bars.

She was very dark of feature, with a Gypsy cast of countenance. Her eyes were brilliant and piercing in their glance. Over her shoulders and form draped a black cape of light fabric, trimmed with red, and surmounted by a hood—and in the hood a keen eye could have detected the hiding of great masses of rich hair. Around her bare, dark-hued arms were clasped fantastic bracelets; and in her chemise she wore a pin of steel beads that glittered with wonderful brightness.

For a long time she had been watching the movements of Pedro; and presently she called to him:

"Hey there, Pedro Gomez!"

"Hey, yourself," he answered, looking up, quickly.

"It's a grand day for the flowers you are so carefully tending."

"So it is," adding, a little gruffly: "but what matters it to you—old Gypsy? What difference can it make to you whether it rains or shines? I warrant your pockets are full of money, from telling fortunes; and when we have money to think of, we have no thought for Nature."

"But I have no money, and I am fond of flowers, else I had not stopped to look at them, and to think how well you have made them grow."

"Take your fill of looking, then, and pass on," he said, though he spoke less harsh, for her compliment pleased him.

"Pedro Gomez, I say!" she called out a second time, after remaining silent a few moments.

"Say on, then. What is it this time? Do you not see that I am busy?"

"But I want one of those flowers that you are digging at. See—that rose with a pretty yellow tinge, and a bud beneath it. Bring it to me, if you will—and here is a golden dollar for it."

"A golden dollar!" exclaimed Pedro, inwardly. "This is some crazy woman! A gold dollar for a rose!" Then aloud: "You shall have the rose, and I will get my dollar!"

When he had plucked the rose, and received the money, he would have returned at once to his labor. But the woman reached through the bars and caught hold of his jacket, firmly.

"Stay, Pedro; I have something to say to you."

"What can it be? Quick, then; for I am paid to work, and not to idle."

"And you are poorly paid, at that."

"It is no business of yours how much—"

"But, what if you could earn more money in less time?"

"What do you mean, Gypsy?"

"Would it not be a good thing, if you

could earn in one day more than you can get with your spade in five years?"

"Ho! what a question! A fool would know enough to say 'yes' to that!"

"And you can do it, Pedro Gomez."

"I?" in great surprise.

"Yes, you, Pedro."

"What riddle are you poking at me? How can it be possible for Pedro Gomez to make more in one day than he is now making in five years?"

"By performing a task that I can tell you of."

"Oh, you can tell me of it?"

"Yes. Do not talk so loud."

"She is certainly a crazy woman!" he resolved, mentally; then asked: "What is this task?"

"A service."

"Eh? The task is a service! I am to do a service. For whom?"

"For my mistress. And, when it is done, she will pay you in glittering gold."

"If she is a crazy woman, she knows well how to tempt me!" Pedro thought.

"I think that Pedro Gomez is the man my mistress wants," continued the strange woman. "If you will serve her, she will reward you well."

"I will serve," Gomez said, while he was wondering what it could be that this singular-spoken female desired to have him do.

"Put away your spade, then, and come with me."

"Go with you?" in renewed surprise.

"Yes."

"How far? Now, there may be some trick in this," and he eyed her suspiciously.

"There is no trick. Do you see that high roof, above the others, some blocks from here?—there, over this way."

"I see."

"Come with me to that house, and I will talk to you."

Gomez did not hesitate long. Giving some instructions to his men, he arranged his coat-sleeves so as to hide the dirt on his brawny arms, and went out at the gate.

Joining the woman, the two moved away, side by side, in silence.

Arriving at the house, they entered by a back door, and she led the way up-stairs, to one of the rooms in the second-story.

"Wait here till I return," she said, immediately leaving him alone.

Pedro was now greatly astonished.

Seating himself in one of the soft chairs, he surveyed the apartment.

Costly furniture with gilt gold fringing; long, crested mirrors; rich tapestries, carpet in which the feet sunk deeply at every step; and at one side was a unique table, containing a small desk wrought of ebony, with pearl-mosaic finish. All these told him that he was in the house of a very wealthy personage; and this, coupled with the mysterious circumstances which brought him there, increased his wonderment to a pitch of uneasiness.

He became restless; he fidgeted about on the chair; finally, he burst forth, half-aloud:

"Who is this Gypsy woman?—if she is a Gypsy woman? Who is her mistress?—if she has a mistress. And what can her mistress want with Pedro Gomez? How did she know my name? That is a question, too. Whose house am I in? It is no place for Pedro Gomez, the gardener. I shall be discovered by some of the servants, presently; and they will first break my head, then pitch me into the gutter! How long am I to sit here on this thing called a chair? A chair?—it's more like a mush-pan to Pedro Gomez! Will she never come, and tell me what is wanted by that mistress of hers?—whoever she may be. That, too, is a question. Ha!—there's a step. Now, then, to see this grand lady, who will tell me how to earn more money in one day than I can get with my spade in five years! Ho! It is not possible! But, she is coming—I hear her step."

CHAPTER VI.

HELENE CERCY FINDS A TOOL.

PEDRO GOMEZ had not long to wait after hearing the approaching footstep.

The door opened, and a beautiful girl entered.

It was Helene Cercey.

In the presence of one so lovely, and under the gaze of those large, dark, lustrous eyes—which she fixed on him the moment she came in—the gardener felt, more than ever, ill at ease; and, crunching his hat in both hands, he arose to bow very awkwardly.

"You are Pedro Gomez?" she said, inquiringly, when she had closed the door and drawn a chair near to him.

"Yes, lady." And mentally: "How the dogs did they find me out, and know my name so well?"

"Be seated." Helene motioned him back to his seat.

Pedro, notwithstanding his embarrassment, took a good look at her; and in his mind he was saying:

"An angel! a fairy! I could serve her in anything! What can she want with me—the poor gardener?"

As if in answer to his questioning thoughts:

"Pedro, I am going to make you rich."

"Can it be possible that you will honor Pedro Gomez—the miserable gardener—with any favor, lady?"

"My servant has told you, no doubt, that I will show you how to make more money in one day than you can make otherwise in five years."

"If you mean the Gypsy woman?—yes, she told me as much."

"She is my servant."

But, Helene Cercey uttered a deliberate falsehood. She had that to say to Pedro Gomez which would not admit of a confident; and, not choosing to trust the task of bringing him there to any one of her servants, she had successfully played the part of the Gypsy woman—disguising herself till all vestige of the rich belle of society was lost.

"And what am I to do, my lady, to earn so much?" Pedro asked.

"The price I will pay you is three thousand dollars—"

"Three thousand dollars!" burst involuntarily from his lips.

"Yes. How much would you do for that amount?"

"I would do anything!" he declared; "anything I could do."

"Stop; let me tell you something, and see if you are in earnest when you say 'anything.' There are two people in New Orleans who hate each other—"

"There are many such pairs," inserted the gardener, who was gradually feeling less embarrassed.

"Be still while I am talking. One of these is braver than the other."

He bowed in a way that said:

"A common case, my lady."

"This brave one," continued Helene, "wishes to be rid of her enemy—"

"Of 'her enemy!'" repeated the Spaniard, smiling meaningly for he was shrewd enough to catch an idea from what he heard.

"Yes, 'of her enemy.' Now she sends for a man who, she thinks, will serve her. She says to him, 'If you will remove this enemy for me, I will pay you thousands of dollars.' What would you do in such a case, if you were the man she sent for?" she warily asked.

"Is this a proposition to Pedro Gomez?" the gardener demanded to know, glancing at her from the corners of his eyes, while the smile on his face became a grin.

"I did not say it was a proposition," Helene answered, frowning slightly.

She was simply sounding him, and had placed a golden inducement before the man whose nature she hardly knew yet.

Pedro at once assumed a sober countenance.

"What would I do, my lady? Well, if the offer came from one whose eyes were dark as yours, and whose voice said three thousand dollars, it is possible—"

"Ah, I think I know you, Pedro Gomez!" she smiled.

He inclined his shaggy head.

"Then you will aid me? You will strike this enemy from my path? For, I will do even more, if you make no mistake. I will sign a document agreeing to give you half my fortune, after fifteen years have elapsed, if the service is rendered."

He opened his eyes in his unbounded amazement.

"Or, further," she added, earnestly, "if that does not altogether suit you, I will give you your choice, between half my fortune and my hand in marriage—after fifteen years, remember."

Pedro Gomez stared. He felt his veins warming, and the words of the beautiful girl tingled in his ears.

He was completely deceived by her tone. He believed that it might be possible for him, one day, to possess this lovely creature! While it seemed preposterous, it filled him with rapture.

"Lady," he stammered, "I will do anything you command for such a reward!"

"It is well. My enemy is to be removed—effectually removed."

"And I will remove her for you!" exclaimed Pedro, whose gaze was still swimming, whose ears were still tingling.

She arose and went to the desk on the small table, from which she obtained a tiny vial—a very tiny vial.

While she was doing this, Pedro was thinking:

"She is not an angel!—she is all devil! But, she is beautiful! I am in love with her—I, Pedro Gomez, the dirty gardener! And if I live for fifteen years—she will be my wife, for she has promised to put such an agreement upon paper. Ho! h-o! what good luck! And three thousand dollars in cash money! I am rich! I am happy! I will obey her in anything!"

He was interrupted by Helene, who approached him.

"You see this vial, Pedro Gomez?"

"Yes, madam."

"It contains a deadly poison."

"Yes."

"The way to administer it is by putting three drops—mark, only three drops—in the center of a rose."

"In the center of a rose," he repeated, paying close attention, and receiving the poisonous vial from her.

"The one who smells of the rose will, at the first inhalation, give a quick start, and look surprised. At the second—which cannot be resisted—the effect is to produce drowsiness. Then there must be somebody to grasp and sustain the stricken one, who will be likely to fall, and press the rose close to the nostrils! Can you recollect?"

"Yes, my lady; I have it by heart. But there is danger in all this to me?"

"None. The cause of death can never be traced to the rose. Will you perform the task properly?"

"It shall be done," promised Gomez.

"Swear it."

"I swear it shall be done!" vowed the Spaniard, sinking to one knee and raising one hand.

"When will you do it?"

"Within one week."

"You do solemnly swear, that, within one week, you will administer poison to my enemy, through the rose?"

"Yes, I solemnly swear!"

"Then you will earn more money by it in one day than you can make with the spade in five years. When it is done I will hear of it without your telling me. Come to me afterward, and you shall have three thousand dollars."

"I think I can trust her," flashed through his mind. "And—by the devil!—if she fooled me, I would make her repent it! But no, she dare not trifle with me. And so beautiful! And, perhaps, after fifteen years, she will be the wife of Pedro Gomez! Excellent fortune! What a rise: from a poor gardener, to the position of a gentleman and then to become the husband of this devil of an angel!"

"Well, Pedro Gomez?" interrogatively, and cutting short his grand painting of mind-pictures.

"Yes, my lady. I was only thinking how generous of you to honor me so—to honor the poor gardener!"

Her red lips curled, as she gazed down on the gardener's uncouth form; but he did not see it, for he was bowing lower, and shaking his head from side to side while speaking:

"Get up, Pedro."

"Yes, my lady," and inwardly: "What a sweet voice! If she is ever my wife, she shall sing me to sleep every night!"

Plainly we see that the hint of becoming his wife was a cunning artifice, for he was

thoroughly deluded, and ready to do whatever Helene Cercy might wish.

The beauty had other intentions for the future of Gomez, while she played a part now that made him pliant in her hands.

"But, lady"—as it suddenly struck him that the most important part of his instructions had been omitted—"who is it I am to remove from your path, with the deadly rose?"

"Her name is Florose Earncliffe," and as she uttered the name, she fastened her dark orbs in a hard, half-frowning gaze upon his face.

Pedro started back. The vial nearly fell from his clasp, and his swarthy face grew red.

"Lady!"

"Not a word! You have sworn to remove my enemy. That enemy is your young mistress, Florose! Remember your oath! Remember the three thousand dollars!"

"And the beautiful devil who may some day be my wife!" added Pedro, in his own mind, trying, himself, to set aside the scruples which had arisen at mention of the gentle Florose.

But, between Helene Cercy and himself, he easily quelled any weak feelings that might have possessed him.

Ten minutes later, he left the house.

And Helene Cercy was walking back and forth in her boudoir, smiling in triumph as she pondered on the oath of Gomez to remove her rival, and the success of her artifice in making him obedient to her wishes.

CHAPTER VII.

CARLOS MENDOZE, THE QUACK.

NIGHT.

Eight o'clock.

With the last stroke of the iron tongue that proclaimed the hour, a carriage rolled away from before the elegant residence of Helene Cercy.

Going from her house, we are right in supposing that its occupant was the plotting, dark eyed belle.

While she is speeding away, we turn to another locality, to an establishment in another quarter of the city.

It was a dilapidated affair; a dingy little store, with one bow window, the frame of which was sunken and rickety, and the contents of which was composed of countless bottles of various sizes, bearing numerous labels of dusty condition. One miserably-spluttering lamp shed a sickly glimmer over the suspicious-looking bottles; and a row of monstrous candles on a shelf inside, served to display the stock of Carlos Mendoze, the Quack.

There were several customers in the store; and old Carlos—a Spaniard, of many years, with pointed features, slim body, of short stature, and wearing a long black ministerial frock-coat—was bowing and bending while he served their wants, and occasionally speaking words of advice.

As the withered old Quack attended to these customers, a carriage whirled past the door—stopping a short distance beyond. In a moment it rumbled on again; and in another moment a new customer entered the shop of Carlos Mendoze. This last was a woman, closely veiled, and attired very plainly.

She did not stop at the counter, but passed straight on, disappearing through a narrow back door.

"Ah!" thought old Carlos, as he gave a momentary glance after the comer; "there is the beautiful belle! She comes again to see Mendoze, the Quack. What does she want this time? I shall learn presently, when these twopenny buyers clear out. Malediction! they spend one dollar, where this beautiful Helene Cercy is paying me hundreds! I have no time for them when she comes. Will they never begone?"

Carlos Mendoze was very anxious to join the visitor who awaited him in the back room. But the customers in his shop annoyed him greatly by standing and talking after they had made their purchases.

When, however, the last one had departed, he made haste to close and lock the door, to keep out all intruders.

"Now then!—now then, for my hundred-dollar customer!" rubbing his skinny hands together and hurrying toward the back room, where his visitor awaited.

Helene Cercy was seated at a large round table, apparently highly impatient at his long delay.

"Ah!" he squeaked, "I am sorry you had to wait so long, madame."

We state here that Helene was a wealthy orphan. Also, that it was a habit with Mendoze to call her "madame," for their acquaintance was, by no means, a fresh one, as we shall see further on.

"I thought you would keep me all night, Carlos Mendoze!"

"Oh, no; not even if I had to drive those beggarly buyers off by force. But I am here now; how can I serve Madame Helene Cercy this time?"

"I have found use for the poison I got of you yesterday."

"Ah!" smiling grimly.

"Now I want something else."

"Something else? What is that something else, madame?"

"An asp, Carlos Mendoze—an asp with a poisoned fang!"

"Ho, h-o!" exclaimed the Quack, within himself, "she wants an asp! What is she going to do with an asp?" Then aloud: "How did you know I could give you an asp, eh? How did you know?"

"You are forgetful. I learned it from your own mouth. When I asked you yesterday for poison, you suggested an asp. But, I preferred the means of the deadly rose. Now, give me an asp; and, also, give me a drug to produce instant stupor—a drowsiness in which the asp can be applied."

"But these things are very precious," whined old Carlos. "My asps are quite expensive."

"What do they cost?"

"The price is two hundred dollars."

"Bring me one, then; and make haste. Make up the drug, too. I must get away from here. The smell of your bottles sickens me."

The shriveled old Quack started to procure what she wanted—lighting a candle, and descending to the cellar, where he kept the horrible things. And as he went, he was muttering:

"So young, and so beautiful! Yet she is a deep one, for she uses drugs and poisons. Ah! I know what you are at, Helene Cercy. You mean to poison Florose Earncliffe, your rival! You shall pay old Carlos much more money, yet, to keep your secret. I know—I know all about it. You can't conceal it from me! I have my thumb on others, rich as you. But the asp? What can she want with the asp? I will find that out, too."

It was some time before he returned.

He brought her a very small, round box, containing what she desired, and, in a few words, instructed her how to use it.

Next, he compounded the drug for her. And in half an hour, Helene Cercy left the shop. Her carriage had returned; and when she had entered this, and was being borne homeward, Carlos Mendoze stood looking after her—tightly clutching the two hundred and fifty dollars she had paid him, for his horrible "goods."

As the Quack was about to retire from the doorway, a figure approached rapidly, ascended the steps, brushed rudely against him, and passed into the shop.

"Ho! Cortez—you are drunk! Malediction!" he snapped.

"No—malediction!—I am not drunk!" snarled back the man, continuing on to the rear apartment, and banging the narrow door spitefully.

"Something is the matter with Cortez!" the Quack exclaimed, a little nervously, as he hastened after this new-comer.

In the rear office stood Cortez Mendoze, the son of Carlos. But Cortez, then, was a youth hardly twenty-two years of age.

He was handsomely-proportioned; with an attractive face, brilliant eyes, and skin of extraordinary purity—the more extraordinary, because Cortez was addicted to habits of dissipation. There was evidence of great muscular strength in him; and a bearing that showed he well knew of his attractiveness.

On this occasion, his face was glowing as if with angry emotion, and he was grinding his fine white teeth savagely.

"Malediction!" cried Carlos. "What is it, my boy? You are mad!"

"Yes, I am mad—malediction!" hissed the

handsome Cortez—using, it will be seen, the favorite exclamation of his unscrupulous father.

"Be calm, my dear Cortez—be calm. Sit down, and tell me what has happened," he urged.

Cortez sat down; but he instantly started up and began striding across the apartment, with clinched fists and scowling brow.

Carlos rung a tiny bell that was upon the table.

The summons brought a negro, who appeared at another door which led to the upper story of the rickety building.

"Bring us some wine, Farak," he said; "and be quick about it."

And when the negro had gone for the wine:

"Sit down, Cortez, my dear boy; tell me what's the matter."

"Matter enough!" growled the young Spaniard. "You know Wart Gomez?"

"Oh, Wart Gomez! the son who quarreled with his father, Pedro, on account of Carline Mandoro?"

"Yes—he who married Carline Mandoro. Malediction!"

"Your old sweetheart?"

"Yes."

"But what of Wart Gomez?"

"We quarreled, three days ago."

"Ho! A quarrel with Wart Gomez! Well?"

"He met me on the street, and dealt me a blow in the face, because, he said, I had spoken slanderously of his wife, Carline."

"Wart Gomez struck you in the face? *Caramba!*"

"Yes—*caramba!*" echoed Cortez, with a hiss, and a snap of his teeth.

"Well! Well! What then?"

The father now partook of the excitement of the son.

At that moment Farak brought the wine. When the negro withdrew, Carlos persuaded his son to a seat.

"Now then, my dear Cortez. What did you do when Wart Gomez struck you?" he demanded.

"I struck back again!" gulping down a glassful of wine.

"Good! Good!" squeaked the father, rubbing his skinny hands till the knuckles cracked, and seeming highly pleased.

"A challenge followed. He was to have met me to-night, at sunset, to fight with pistols."

"Yes—yes. And you would have shot him?"

"But he did not come! Malediction!" shouted Cortez, smiting the table with his fist.

"Ho! how cowardly!"

"Instead, he sent this note. Read it."

He threw a slip of paper toward his father; and the latter read as follows:

"CORTEZ MENDOZE:—

"I shall not meet you. For two reasons, I will not fight you: first, I have a wife and child who depend upon my labor; second, you are not worthy of my anger.

"WART GOMEZ."

"The coward!" exclaimed Carlos.

"But he shall not escape me! I will have his life! He struck me, and now tries to sneak from the penalty. The blow on my cheek still smart. Malediction!"

"Yes—malediction!" accepted Carlos, refilling the tumblers. "Since he will not fight you fairly, you must have revenge!"

"And I will have it! *Caramba!*"

"*Caramba!*—yes."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE HISTORY.

In a western section of the city was situated the house of Wart Gomez, the son of Pedro.

But there was a vast difference between father and son. The younger Gomez was a man of many accomplishments, acquired by himself, and which had obtained him, first, a clerkship at a handsome salary, and, afterward, a position with his employers that was almost a partnership.

In consequence of steady habits, and close attention to business, the young man had saved a deal of money, and was very comfortable in this world's goods.

He married a beautiful girl, whose name was Carline Mandoro; and the result of this marriage was a quarrel with his father, Pedro

Gomez, which led to a separation between them.

Carline's father was a Spaniard—her mother an Englishwoman; and they were well-to-do, if not rich. It was because of this that Pedro objected to the union, declaring that she was too far above Gomez to become his wife—the wife of a son of a gardener.

But, Wart was ambitious; and he stood high in the esteem and confidence of his employers. He won the girl's affections—while she was living at a hotel, with her widowed mother—and married her. And the pair were well-mated, for they loved each other fondly.

It was the third night after that on which Helene Cerey visited Mendoza, the Quack.

In the parlor of Wart Gomez's snug house, husband and wife and child were assembled—the latter, a girl, four years and three months old. And Zetta, the servant—who was about Carline's own age—was amusing the child, while her master and mistress conversed.

On this evening Carline appeared to be very uneasy. Her eyes glanced restlessly about; her voice was unsteady; and Gomez missed the sunny smile with which she was wont to welcome him, when he returned to his home at nightfall.

"Carline," he said, "you are too sad to-night. You are anxious without good cause. Come—look up and smile; and think no more of Cortez Mendoza. We need not fear him."

"I cannot drive off the feeling, Wart," was the despondent return. "I am trembling in a dread of something terrible that is about to happen."

"Why should you?"

"Cortez Mendoza will never forgive you the blow you struck him."

"I could not help it, Carline! The scoundrel was heard to boast, in a wine-shop, that you had once been his sweetheart."

"And was it not true, Wart?" with a shudder.

"Ay, but he deceived you—deceived your mother! He came to you, dressed in fine clothes, and with pretty speeches. He said he was rich; and I proved to you that he lied. He was poor, an adventurer, and no fit companion for one so pure as Carline Mandoro. My blood boiled when I heard of his language, so I struck him for his baseness."

"And I fear he will seek some terrible revenge; for he is very passionate. I cannot rest easy, dear Wart."

"Pah! Forget him."

"And then, to-day, when I was dusting my bureau—you know the box containing the Star of Diamonds?"

"Yes; in the top drawer."

"I opened the drawer, to put away some trifles, when the lid of the box flew wide, with a loud 'click.'"

"Well?"

"Wart—I—"

"It is nothing—the jar of opening the drawer, perhaps."

"I could not help but feel that it foretold some great calamity."

"Poh! What an idea!"

"For, Wart," her voice sunk low, and she turned her pale face earnestly to his, "it flew open in the same way just before my mother's mother died."

"Ah! yes; now I remember, you promised to tell me all concerning this mysterious Star, and the facts attached to it. It has a strange history, you say. Then you must reveal it to me."

"Yes—very strange. I will tell you. And then you can see that I am not uselessly worried by its box-lid flying open in my face. And, doing so at a time when we have a deadly enemy in Cortez Mendoza, and after you have had a quarrel with him, I have cause to think there is danger hovering near. Oh, Wart! What is coming?" and she buried her face in her hands as if the dread that had fastened upon her was momentarily increasing.

"But, this strange history, Carline?" shifting his position nervously. "Tell me, now, about this Star of Diamonds?"

Zetta, the maid, and Zuelo, the little girl, were silent and attentive, too, as Carline began to explain the mystery and facts of the Star of Diamonds.

Even the child was impressed by the solemn tone in which her mother spoke.

And while a brief silence ensued upon the last speech of Wart Gomez, there was a face peering in at the open window—the face of a man, with an expression that was scowling, angry, ominous.

"THERE once lived in the city of London," Carline commenced, "a very wealthy merchant, whose name was Waldorf Cerey. He was a man of violent passions, yet who, when he loved, could love as few men can. He was a bachelor; and, at the time of which I speak, had taken a young and beautiful girl from a home of poverty and made her his housekeeper."

"Her name was Lona. After awhile he came to love this girl; and, finally, he married her. She appeared to make him a good wife, and they lived very happily together."

"But, this seeming happiness was not to last. Lona had had a lover before she became the wife of Waldorf Cerey; and this love was not quenched at the time she married her benefactor—nor was it ever buried."

"By her he had a son. When this son was two years old Waldorf discovered certain things that made him doubt his wife's constancy; one of which was a letter signed 'Clayforde.' There was no date to the epistle; but he saw that the writing was fresh; it was addressed to his wife in affectionate terms, and among other things, its author said: 'I will soon return, dear Lona, when, after this long and dreary separation, we may be reunited in our love. For I have been prosperous, and have a home of luxury to offer her whom another had nearly robbed me of.'

"There was so much in this to excite the husband's suspicions, that he thereafter watched his wife closely. Six months later, he discovered her in a private interview with this man named Clayforde, though she was not aware of the vigilance of the wronged husband. And the object of the meeting was to plot an elopement for a date when he (Clayforde) should return to London, after three months' absence on important business."

"Having made sure of his wife's perfidy, Waldorf Cerey was enraged. As he had loved, he now hated her. And hate with him was terrible. He did not betray his knowledge of the abominable plot, but secretly nursed his burning passion, and resolved upon a fearful course."

"He went to a jeweler, and gave him the design for a costly ornament—a star, to be wrought of diamonds and gold wire intermingled."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wart Gomez, breaking in, "here is the origin of the star—with Waldorf Cerey, the injured husband. Now, then, for the part it played! Go on, Carline."

Carline resumed:

"When the star was completed, Waldorf Cerey took it from the jeweler, and sought the shop of a poverty stricken apothecary. And it was because the apothecary was poor that he went to him. He offered him a large sum—a fortune to him—if he would compound a deliciously-odorous something, which, if kept beneath the nostrils of a person for two hours, would be sure death to the one inhaling it. The apothecary agreed. More: when the merchant showed him the diamond-set star, he proposed to take it, and impregnate it with the poisonous exhalant."

"Winter had come. There was a grand ball gotten up by one of the merchant's friends, and Waldorf Cerey and his wife were among the invited guests. Just before leaving their residence, he presented Lona with the star, and requested her to wear it upon her bosom. She was in ecstasies of delight over the lovely gift, and caressed him fondly while she thanked him for the gem. It was the last time she ever embraced him; for, from the moment they entered their carriage, the deadly fragrance began its work."

"By eleven o'clock, she complained of being sleepy. At midnight, the company was thrown into great consternation by seeing her suddenly fall prostrate, in the midst of a dance. She never spoke one word from the time she fell. Among the party was a physician. He pronounced life extinct. Her death, it was generally supposed, was caused by over-excitement. But the grave physi-

cian had suspicions, though he was silent. He had detected the peculiar fragrance with which the Star of Diamonds was pregnant; and, while he at once concluded that it was a case of poisoning, he was not sufficiently satisfied to warrant the expression of an opinion.

"When Waldorf Cercey, in company with the physician, conveyed his dead wife homeward, he contrived—as he thought, unperceived—to slip the star into his overcoat pocket.

"Lona had been buried just ten days, when the merchant—satisfied with his vengeance, and believing his horrible act concealed—began to experience a strange illness. He lost flesh rapidly, his face, usually full and flushed, became sallow and haggard. He was frightened; for he could not account for his condition. He was forced to his bed, and sent for a physician—who happened to be the same gentleman that accompanied him home on the night of the death of Lona. His name was Horace Stafford.

"The physician attended him regularly. But it was soon evident that Waldorf Cercey could not live. He called Horace Stafford to his bedside, one day, and said he knew he was dying, and must make a confession. Imagine his surprise, when Stafford informed him that it was unnecessary—he knew all. He went to the wardrobe and took the star from the merchant's overcoat pocket—where it had remained, really forgotten, since the night he took it from his dead wife's bosom.

"Holding it up before the dying man, Stafford said: 'See, Waldorf Cercey! the same instrument of your wife's death has been yours. Unknowingly, you have, day after day, in small quantities, inhaled the deadly fragrance that is in this star. I guessed what ailed you; but, when you called me in, you were past all power of remedy. It is retribution!'

"Waldorf Cercey died. The physician learned from him, ere he breathed his last, the whereabouts of the apothecary; and seeking him, and ascertaining, by means of threats, exactly what the star contained, he at last succeeded in abstracting the poisonous perfume. He kept the star. It was never again seen in public.

"I will tell you, here, that Everard, the son of Waldorf Cercey, married when he reached the age of twenty-one. In this marriage, he had a daughter, who was named Helene. She (Helene) now lives in New Orleans, is wealthy, is an orphan—a belle of society.

"Horace Stafford was a married man, at the time of Waldorf Cercey's decease. He had a daughter. That daughter grew up, and was married to one Ruy Mandoro, in the same year that Everard Cercey was married. I, you know, am the daughter of Ruy Mandoro and Nora Stafford. But now of the star again.

"Though my grandfather had cleansed the gem, and made it harmless, it would seem that fatality was to be its history. One morning, when Mrs. Stafford—my mother's mother—was in her room, she had occasion to procure something from her bureau. The box containing the star was kept in the top drawer—as I have been keeping it. As she opened the drawer, the lid of the box flew wide—as it did with me to-day. Within twenty-four hours, as she was descending the stairs, carrying a small fruit-salver with a knife on it, she tripped, and the knife, in some way, pierced the unfortunate woman to the heart.

"After that, my mother took the star, and with an engraver's chisel cut my name on the back of it. But, you see, dear Wart, I have cause to feel uneasy. Nearly every one who has had the star has been unfortunate—my mother being the only exception. And, to-day the lid flew open, as it did when it foretold the death of my mother's mother."

"Let us throw the accursed thing away!" cried Wart Gomez, when she had concluded, and seeming deeply impressed with what he had heard.

"No," said Carline slowly; "I promised mother, when she died, that I would retain it as long as I lived, and give it to my eldest child, who should do the same. It was an unkind request; but, I gave my promise, and, come what may, I shall keep it."

"Then do not let it disturb you. Forget

what happened this morning—and fear nothing, my good Carline."

But, even as Wart Gomez spoke the encouraging words, there came a loud knock at the door.

He was first to recover from the start of surprise this unexpected and peremptory summons caused, and arose to see who the comer was.

A man stood upon the threshold—a figure dressed all in black, and who wore a mask of like color.

"Who are you?" demanded Gomez.

"Your enemy!" was hissed in reply.

"Ha! I know you, Cor—"

"Then fight to save yourself, coward!" and, with the words, the masked man sprung forward, a knife-blade gleaming in his hand.

The two closed in a deadly struggle, and backward and forward they went, overturning the chairs and tearing the carpet as they fought; for Gomez, though unarmed, proved himself a formidable adversary.

Zetta stood like one petrified; then, uttering a cry, fainted away, while the child clung to her, screaming.

Carline's face was very white, but she was herself. She grasped up a heavy cane that stood in one corner, and bounded to the aid of her husband.

The cane twirled in the air, over the panting combatants—then descended, inflicting a ghastly wound on the head of the assassin—assassin, because, ere the blow was struck, Wart Gomez uttered a piercing shriek and sunk, lifeless, to the floor.

The wearer of the mask, enraged to madness by the wound from the cane, next struck at Carline with his knife.

"Now for that star that is so valuable!" cried the wretch; and he dashed up the stairs—for it was he who had looked in and listened at the window, during Carline's recital.

He was not long finding the jewel.

As he descended the stairs he was met by Carline. Cane in hand, the brave woman disputed his progress.

"Cortez Mendozel—murderer!" she screamed; "you have killed my husband!"

"Ho! But I am not Cortez Mendozel!" bellowed the masked man.

At the same time, ere she could bring down the cane that was poised above her, she was struck by a huge, merciless fist.

He grasped her up in his arms and fled from the house by the back way. Zetta had recovered from her swoon; she was at the door, and:

"Help! Help! Help!" was shrieked on the stillness of the night, in piercing accents.

The alarm spread quickly.

In a brief space, an angry crowd was in hot pursuit of the murderer.

They pressed him closely. He was compelled to dropped his burden, which he did, exclaiming, with a curse:

'Devil take it! I have made a botch of this. I hope I have not killed her, too. Now then, whelps, come on!'

Relieved of his impediment, he soon eluded those who pursued him.

The house of Wart Gomez was closed and gloomy.

A week had passed. Gomez had been buried; and Zetta, the maid, with Zuelo, the child, were the sole occupants of the dwelling.

Carline had disappeared.

Much of the excitement that ensued upon the bold, yet fiendish deed, had subsided; but the authorities were vigilant, and their detectives were hard at work trying to ferret out the murderer.

Zetta, the maid, had fainted ere she had time to imagine who it was with whom her master had struggled, and she had not heard her mistress cry out the words of recognition, when she disputed the assassin's progress on the stairway; else her evidence might, or might not, have let loose the sleuth-hounds of the law on the right scent.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORK OF THE DEADLY ROSE.

So great was the enmity existing between Pedro Gomez and his son, that the former did not attend the funeral of the murdered man.

Moreover, and independent of the enmity, Pedro did not wish to be absent from his post in the garden.

He knew that his young mistress, Florose, sometimes walked alone among the flowers in the shady paths, and upon one of these occasions he meant to fulfill his promise to the beautiful fiend who had agreed to give him three thousand dollars for administering the poison through the deadly rose.

But with all his watchfulness, the desired opportunity had not yet presented itself.

Florose had wandered there, near him, many times; but she was never alone—either her father or some visitor being her companion.

It was now the last day of the week in which he had sworn to perform the fearful task—three days after the tragedy at the house of his son and enemy—which, we neglected to state definitely, was situated at a point quite near the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad. And he began to fear that he would not be able to do what he had promised in the time specified.

Besides being the last day, one-half of that day was gone; for he and the men under him were working, at this moment, after their noon rest.

"Satan is sporting with me!" he would growl, as he plied his spade and glanced anon toward the house. "Here it is a week since I made my bargain, and I have done nothing. The time is up and I shall lose my three thousand golden dollars! And my beautiful new mistress! By the devil! I shall lose her, too! And I shall still be Pedro Gomez, the poor gardener—instead of Gomez, the gentleman, and the husband of the devil-of-an angel! Too bad! How hard I work! That contract which, after fifteen years, would give her to me for a wife!—what a pity! Tut! tut! I am mad when I think of the good luck slipping through—eh? O-h-o!"

As Pedro soliloquized thus regretfully, he stopped short, opened his eyes, and looked steadfast toward a clump of tall shrubs.

It was a shady, perfumed bower his own hands had wrought, with a large, easy, reclining seat; and on this seat, reading a book, was Florose Earncliffe—a picture of beauty in a hallowed precinct.

"Ho!" he exclaimed under his breath, "she is here at last! Now, how did she get there without my seeing her? and when did she come? No matter; since she is there, that is enough for Pedro Gomez. Now for the rose. The vial?—ah! it is here."

He plucked a large red rose from a bush near him, and—turning his back toward his intended victim, that she might not, by a chance observation, see what he was at—he let fall precisely three drops from the tiny vial onto the center of the blushing petals.

"Now, by the devil!" he muttered, "I must not let this curst thing get too close to my own nose, else Pedro Gomez, instead, will fall dead in his tracks!"

Restoring the vial to his breast-pocket, he held the rose behind him, and advanced toward the lovely girl.

Hearing his step on the hard walk, she looked up.

"Ah, Pedro!" with a sweet smile, "you see I am enjoying the bower you made for me. It is a delightful little retreat. How do you do to-day?"

"Well enough, Mistress Florose. I hope you are the same," bowing, in his awkward way, and holding his tattered hat in one hand.

While he bowed, he was saying, to himself:

"What an admirable place! No one will see me hand her the rose—she will smell of it—she will fall—and I can crunch the thing with my foot. Then I will cry for help—and all is well done. Yes, it is admirable! I will get my three thousand dollars! I will try to live for fifteen years, and marry the beautiful devil-of-an angel who employs me! Oh, how very admirable!"

"Those were nice flowers you sent me to wear in my hair at the *soiree* last evening, Pedro. I should have thanked you for them sooner. You merit a great deal of praise for the way in which you have managed our garden."

"I have but done my best to please, Mistress Florose. I think I have earned my

pay; but I seek no praise," with another bow, very low and very humble.

"You have made a little Paradise for us. So, you must receive thanks, as well as money; and especially from me—for, oh! I do love to see the roses blooming gaudily!"

"Will you accept this from me?" he asked. "I am only a poor gardener, yet I love my labor, and I sometimes see good things in its fruits. It is this."

He held the rose toward her, and bowed again, obsequiously.

"How beautiful! Thank you, Pedro."

Helene Cercy was not wrong when she informed the gardener what would be the effect produced in the one who should smell of the poisoned rose.

When Florose received his offering, she immediately raised it to her pretty face, and inhaled the perfume of the deep-red petals. Pedro, who watched her, saw her start and glance at him, as if in surprise from some cause.

"Why, Pedro, what a strange fragrance! But, how delicious!"

"Very strange; and it was because of that—" Pedro began, when he perceived her eyes suddenly droop—the rose fell from her hand—she swayed dizzily.

"Pedro! Pedro!—that rose is poisoned! You—you did—"

Quick as a flash, he snatched up the fatal thing, and, following the instructions of his fiend mistress, held it close to the nostrils of the young girl, while he supported her sinking form.

"Pedro!" The voice was scarce louder than a startled whisper.

"Ho, there! Reno! Diaz! Help!—help, here!" and, while he called for assistance, he crushed the tell-tale rose beneath the heel of his boot.

The men dropped their spades and came running.

"Mistress Florose has been stung by a serpent!" he explained, affecting much excitement. "Help me with her."

They bore her carefully in their arms in the direction of the house.

Elsor Earncliffe, from the interior, saw them approaching.

To him the sight was terribly significant; it told that something had befallen his child. With mind harassed by gnawing fears, he rushed to the doorway.

"My daughter!" he gasped, staring wildly from one to another of the men; what has happened to her? Speak!"

Pedro Gomez explained that she must have been stung by a serpent while reading in the garden.

He exhibited one of the wrists of the lifeless girl, and there was an irritated puncture visible, close to one of the blue veins, which made his story plausible.

Ah! cunning, devilish Gomez! He was shrewd as he was wicked. The puncture was from the point of his sharp knife, and the redness surrounding it was the result of his rubbing a poisonous leaf briskly into the wound.

The family physician was summoned immediately.

When the medical gentleman arrived, he saw that he had been called in to gaze upon a corpse.

Elsor Earncliffe stood near to the doctor—his eyes fairly starting, his face white and fearful, and whole mien that of one who dreads the announcement of some terrible truth.

It was a moment of supreme agony.

"Well? Well?" he panted, grasping the physician's arm. "Tell me—tell me the worst!"

"She is dead," was the sad, hesitating answer.

"Dead? Oh, Heaven!"

Elsor Earncliffe, in his declining years, had made his only child, Florose, the pet, the idol of his fondest hopes. This shock cut like a dagger-thrust to his heart.

As he cried out these words, he sunk to the floor, as if he had been shot.

He never spoke again. Helene Cercy, the beautiful fiend, and Pedro Gomez, her tool, had apparently two deaths to answer for at the great tribunal of judgment.

But the physician had examined the wound on the wrist. He had heard the story of the serpent, which Pedro inaugurated. He knew that the puncture was not the consequence

of a bite or a sting, but did perceive that it was inflicted with a sharp instrument of some kind.

He was quick to suspect. He suspected foul play. His suspicion turned upon Pedro Gomez, the one who had first been seen with Florose, who was most loud in his lamentations, and who was rather over-persistent in telling the story of a possible serpent in the garden.

And, though he did not know it, Pedro Gomez was under detective surveillance within two hours after the tragedy—the result of a visit paid by the doctor to the chief of police, where he freely expressed his belief that Florose Earncliffe had come to her death through a conspiracy, by which poison was administered.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAP SET.

HELENE CERCY could love, and she could hate—qualities inherited, it will be seen, from her grandfather, Waldorf Cercy.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day after the death of her rival and victim, Florose Earncliffe, being one week subsequent to the murder of Wart Gomez.

As she had told Pedro she would, she heard of the calamity, soon after its happening, without his apprising her.

And we find her, twice beautiful in the flush of her wicked triumph, walking to and fro in the room where she had bargained with the gardener for the performance of the fiendish deed that was to put out a young life in the very vigor of its usefulness, and deprive a doting parent of the sole earthly idol of his affection.

Society had been overwhelmed by the suddenness of this singular death; strange surmises were whispered among the grave and suspicious. But, Helene Cercy, the heartless instigator of the foul crime that had been committed, felt secure in her guilt, and inwardly laughed while her voice arose with others in surprise and regret.

Within the hour, she had returned from the graves of father and child; she had not yet cast aside the rich suit of black which she wore to further display her hypocritical grief. But, with crimsoned face, excited breath, and lustrous eyes burning in their glance, she smiled, she laughed, she exclaimed:

"Aha! Aha! It is all over now! Sleep peacefully, Florose, my pretty rival. Heaven is not half so unkind as this world, even in moments of greatest happiness. You brought the weapon of my hate to bear upon you; though, poor thing! you little dreamed how Helene Cercy suffered in your victories, nor that she meant you ill. Once—" and her tone sunk low, as she paused and gazed thoughtfully down at the carpet, "my heart fluttered; I wavered in what I had planned, and thought—a foolish thought! of recalling Pedro Gomez to tell him to desist. It was my purer nature then—pooh! You stood between Dwyer Allison and me; that was sufficient. Now he is free. He must be mine! He must! Perhaps it will not be so difficult to win him, after all."

She went to the desk and began to write.

In a few moments she had penned a note as follows:

"LXR of hope! \$200 for a love-powder. Send this evening at 8 precisely."

Then she wrote, on another sheet:

"MR. DWYER ALLISON:—

"I extend to you my sympathies in this sad sorrow. But, I feel with others, that we have lost one who was endeared to all who knew her, and whose absence forever from our now grieving circle will always be realized as a deprivation of what was more than loved. I would speak with you. I have a matter of importance to communicate. Will you please call to-morrow evening at 8:30?"

"HELENE CERCY."

The first, which had neither name at the top nor signature at the bottom, she inclosed in a sealed envelope, and addressed to Cortez Mendoza.

Ringling a bell, she said to the maid who answered her summons:

"Ola, you know where to find the shop of Mendoza, the Quack?"

"Yes, my lady."

"On Willow street. Here is a note I wish you to deliver to him."

As she received the note, the maid was wondering:

"What can my lady be at? What business can she have with the old Quack?"

As if she read the thought of her maid:

"Be careful that you are not seen going there. Be careful that you are alone with Carlos Mendoza, when you hand him the missive. Be careful that you do not speak to any one of this errand. Finally, do not attempt to pry into the secrets and affairs of your mistress. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, my lady."

"For, Ola—" and the beauty fixed her dark eyes piercingly on the girl, "if you neglect to pay close heed to what I have said, it may bring you before the law."

"The law, my lady!" in astonishment.

"Yes—it is not pleasant to be dragged into the witness stand, is it, Ola?"

"Certainly not, my lady!" a little nervously.

"And you would be dragged there if you disregard my instructions."

"I—?"

"Yes. I would make public what I heard you say to the hall-servant last night. You told him there was a rumor afloat that Florose Earncliffe had been foully dealt with—and you believed it. If you do not follow my instructions exactly, I will feed that rumor, by saying that I have a maid who believes the report, and expresses her opinion as if she knew more about it than she dare betray. You see? Then an investigation by the authorities, and you will have to explain upon what ground you based your bold opinions. All very unpleasant. It would make you notorious, and injure your good name eventually. Be advised by me. Go now, and before you leave the house, send Mijo here."

The maid withdrew in a tremble, for the accent of voice, the significant speech, the threatening glitter of the dark eyes, with all of which Helene Cercy warned her to "be careful," made her feel very uneasy.

Shortly after the girl's departure, Mijo, a young mulatto, entered the apartment. To him she gave the second note, addressed to Dwyer Allison, and bade him carry it with dispatch to its address.

The two notes sent on their missions, Helene once more gave herself up to the rejoicings of her heart over the safe removal of her rival.

Now, indeed, was she at last to realize the full measure of her happiness!

It was when night had drawn upon the city that the hall-servant announced a visitor—in the vestibule.

"In the vestibule! Who is it?" exclaimed and asked Helene.

"I do not know who it is, my lady; but though he is dressed passably, his face is vulgar, and he has a voice like the growl of a beast."

"It is Pedro Gomez! He is here in answer to the sign I gave him to-day, when my barouche passed," she thought; and then, aloud:

"Show him up here."

"Up here, my lady?"

"Don't make me speak twice! You heard what I said."

"Yes, my lady."

When alone she went to one side, and drew apart a portion of the tapestry, which concealed what appeared to be the door of a closet, but which was an entrance to an adjoining room.

Opening this door, she called lowly:

"Sh! Are you there?"

"Yes," answered more than one voice, guardedly.

"Remember," she added, "when I clap my hands three times," and reclosed the hidden door.

"Now, Pedro Gomez, I will attend to you."

She took something from the small desk, and slipped it quietly into her pocket. Then she listened to the footsteps that were approaching along the hall without.

Had Pedro Gomez known of, been able to see, or capable of imagining, the extent of meaning and danger that dwelt

in the features of her who awaited his appearance, it is probable he would have hesitated before advancing beyond the doorway of the tapestried room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAP SPRUNG.

BUT, Pedro Gomez did not know, nor could see, nor was capable of imagining that he had anything to fear from the beautiful girl who had made him the tool of her diabolical wickedness.

He was ushered into the apartment—to meet a lovely face, bright and smiling; and Helene, reaching out one hand, greeted him cordially.

"Well, Pedro, I am glad to see you."

Then, to the gaping servant who was wondering what his mistress could have to do with such a man—whoever he was, and why she should receive him in the tapestried room:

"Bid Mijo fetch us some wine, if he has returned from his errand."

"Yes, my lady."

And with a final stare at the tall, broad, coarse Pedro Gomez, the man withdrew.

Pedro was attired in a very respectable suit of clothes, and his face was cleanly shaved. But he felt very awkward in Helene's presence, because he saw her scan him rapidly from head to foot; and to himself he was saying, while he took her dainty hand in his big fist and bowed over it:

"A curse upon these toggeries I have on! By the devil! I am pinched and sore! Better to have come with my spade under my arm, an independent gardener, than to try to play the gentleman in a coat that is too narrow, and pants that are too tight. I wish they were well off of me!"

And Helene to herself:

"He thought he would please me by coming here well-dressed. Poor fellow! A bear in a gilt cage. But, I am going to fix him, presently. Pedro Gomez knows too much. He is dangerous." Then aloud:

"You saw my signal to-day, Pedro? Sit down."

"Yes, lady; and I thought it meant to come to you," adding, mentally, as he seated himself: "Now, then! I am in this mush-pan-of-a-seat again. I hate it. But the chairs shall be different when we are married—this beautiful devil-of-an-angel and I! How handsome she looks to-night! Ah, see! She is going to pay me the three thousand dollars! How noble—how true to her promise! Look!" the closing portion, as Helene went to the desk and began counting over a number of crisp bills.

"Pedro"—running over the money while speaking.

"Yes, my lady?"

"You have served me well. I think you and I can get along very nicely together."

"How angelic!" he thought; and, "Yes, lady," he said.

"Here is what I promised you for your services."

She went up to him, and extended a great roll of bank-bills.

Pedro, in his eagerness, arose and bowed—arose so quickly that he upset the chair and tipped over on his toes, as he bent to receive the money.

"A million of thanks, lady!" and mentally: "Curse that mush-pan-of-a-chair! It is making an ass of Pedro Gomez."

For Mijo, who just then entered with the wine, saw the accident and could not help grinning.

"Mijo, begone." The order in a severe tone, and frowning as she detected the grin in the mulatto's face.

She wheeled forward the small table, on which Mijo had set the wine, and drew a chair near to her visitor.

"Ah! that careless servant!" she exclaimed. "Pedro—bring me that small writing-desk from the corner."

He hastened to obey.

His back was turned hardly a moment; yet, in that time, she accomplished an object. When he brought the desk, and placed it at her feet, she motioned him to his seat, and filled two glasses with the sparkling wine.

"Let us drink, Pedro."

"Ay, we will drink. A long life to you, my lady," tossing off the liquor at a gulp. He sipped at the edge of the glass.

"Ah! how good that is—but strong, very strong."

"You are a strong man, Pedro," with a smile.

"Yes, true, I am a strong man," and with in, as he held the glass to be refilled: "Oh! see her smile. What a beautiful devil she is! And if I live for fifteen years—" he stopped short in his thoughts, for it struck him that Helene Cercy had not yet fulfilled the whole of her part of their bargain.

"Well, Pedro?—now, is not this wine delicious?"

"It is heavenly! But, lady—"

"Say on, Pedro."

"You have forgotten something."

"I? Forgotten?—what?"

"Did you not promise to sign an agreement to become my wife, if I desired, after fifteen years?"

Pedro was becoming bolder. The wine was strong. The first draught had gone to his head; the second made the blood rise to his face; now, when he paused, at the third, to remind her of the promised contract, he felt his whole system glowing strangely.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" she laughed, playfully, "I had really forgotten it. But it is ready. It is here, in the desk—somewhere. Drink again, Pedro, while I look for it. Drink."

Helene Cercy did not know whether Pedro could read or not. For fear of missing her object, by arousing his suspicions, she had, indeed, prepared the contract mentioned—one that, after fifteen years, would give him either half her fortune or her hand in marriage.

When she drew the document out of the desk, the gardener had drained another glass.

"Not long, now!" she thought, bestowing a covert glance upon him; "he will soon topple over, and then—"

"Ah! here it is, Pedro."

"Lady, you are kind to me. I shall try to live for fifteen years, and marry you. Yes, we must get married." He was talking a little thickly.

"You think you would like to be my husband, then?"

"I love you to madness!" he exclaimed.

"I must live for fifteen years, to marry you."

"We would be a very happy couple, no doubt. Drink again, Pedro," and Helene Cercy laughed—for two reasons: first, the presumption of the gardener was ridiculous; second, because she saw that he could not keep up much longer.

"Yes, we will drink again!" and he laughed—for two reasons: first, because he could not help it; second, because he was elated with the golden prospects.

"And we will have wine like this on our table always."

"Yes, always wine like this!" he echoed, rather boisterously.

"Drink again, Pedro."

He was already swaying in his seat. Two—three—four beautiful girls were floating in his vision; each smiled upon him, each proffered a glass of the sweet wine that was intoxicating him.

"Presently I shall be drunk!" struggled through his bewildered brain.

"I am swimming round and round like a chip in a whirlpool; and not one, but many beautiful devils are before me. But I will drink again. I will drink till I can drink no more; then sleep it off while she fans my brow. And—by the devil! my head is afe. I feel strangely! I am burning! some one is closing my eyes!" And aloud, as he started up, and groped blindly:

"Ho! let me up. There is a trick here! that wine is drugged! ha! you devil-angel! you—you—I—" The glass fell from his hand and was shattered on the floor, and Pedro sunk helplessly backward in his chair.

When she saw her tool completely in her power, her dark eyes flashed, and she could not suppress the hard laugh that rose to her lips.

She hurriedly extracted the document from Pedro's pocket, and threw it into the small desk.

Then she clapped her hands thrice.

At the signal, a portion of the drapery was pushed aside, and two wolf-visaged men darted out.

"There!" she cried, pointing to the insensible gardener. "Be sure you apply the

asp, as I instructed you. You will find your pay in his pockets. Do not make a half-way job of it, now."

"Never fear on that," growled one.

Grasping up the limp and heavy Pedro Gomez, they carried him through the secret door.

All was still.

"Now!" she broke forth, with a grating laugh, "let them trace the death of Florose Earncliffe to me, if they can! Ha! who's that?"

Some one was thumping on the panel of the door leading to the hall—thumping guardedly, yet persistently.

"Who can it be?"

She advanced, and turned the key in the lock—then uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

She was confronted by Carlos Mendoza!

CHAPTER XII.

CARLOS MENDOZE STEALS.

THERE stood the shriveled old Quack in his very long, very gown-like frock-coat—his hat in one hand, an impish smile on his narrow face, and a cunning leer in the little black eyes.

"Carlos Mendoza! You here!"

"Ha! did you not send for me?" inquired the squeaky voice.

"True. But—how came you here, at this door, unannounced? How did you pass the hall-servant?"

"That is not so wonderful, madame."

"Explain."

"Malediction! I did not pass the hall-servant. Had I come so that others could see me, would it not have been dangerous?"

He had entered the room; and she had closed the door, facing him in her surprise and inquiry.

"Dangerous, Carlos Mendoza?"

"Caramba! yes," and whining: "would it not be dangerous to madame, if any of the servants had seen me coming here?—seen Mendoza, the Quack, entering the house of the beautiful belle, for a private interview? Eh?"

"But—"

"Madame has a good character. Mendoza has not. Servants will talk, and they oft-times ruin a family, by their chatter, chatter, chatter. Ho! do you not comprehend?"

"Then, by what means—"

"Besides," he interrupted, "I do not care to be seen in places of this kind—in the halls of the rich, with beautiful belles, who buy poisons, and asps, and drugs, and love-powders. Madame has just got rid of a visitor." The last with a glance at the wine-table.

"Carlos Mendoza, tell me how you gained access to my house, to my private apartments, without being seen by any of my servants?" Helene spoke impatiently.

"Nothing easier!—nothing easier!" whined the squeaky voice. "The garden gate was wide open—so were the windows of the parlor. To climb the balcony was no trouble—to tip-toe up here was less difficult. You see?"

She was regarding him keenly. And through her mind flashed:

"How long was he at that door?—what did he see, perhaps, through the keyhole?"

But the face of the Quack told her nothing. It was the same as always—unreadable, save that the little black eyes were snapping and sparkling perceptibly more than usual.

"You see? Malediction! I outwitted the servants, and am here. He! he! he! he! And I come on business, madame," the closing sentence more seriously.

"Yes, on business. You received my note?"

She left the door, and gave up trying to imagine whether Carlos Mendoza had heard or seen aught of what had transpired in the room a few moments before.

"The note came," he answered, whispering, and nodding his head.

"And the powder?"

"It is here. Malediction! I could not refuse two hundred dollars for ten minutes' work. Here, madame."

From one of the deep pockets in his long frock coat he produced a small, neatly-folded crimson paper.

She snatched it from him, with an exclamation of satisfaction, and thrust it into her bosom.

"The dose, Carlos Mendoza—how much?"
"Half the powder to a bottle of wine, madame."

"And the effect?"

"Charming! Whoever drinks of it must yield to all the fires and impulses of love. It is admirable. It has never failed. I have sold a great deal of it. Carlos Mendoza has made more love-matches than a dozen designing mothers! Ho! ho! h-o!" and he chuckled aloud at the thought.

"If I administer this to a companion, he or she will love me?"

"Will worship you!—will embrace you!—kiss you! Excellent! It is just what you want. Ho! ho! h-o!"

"How do you know that it is just what I want, Carlos Mendoza?" and the dark eyes bent upon him in a sharp gaze.

"How do I know? What a question! Malédiction! I have sold five hundred such powders. They are only sought for one purpose. You wish some one to love you, whether they please or not—so?"

"It is no business of yours, Carlos Mendoza."

"Madame is right; it is none of my business," and to himself he added: "*Caramba!* We'll see about that, my beautiful belle! Oho! Wait!"

"The price of this is two hundred dollars?"

"Yes, madame, and it is very cheap."

"Remain here a few moments, and I will bring you the money."

When she had disappeared, the Quack took a quick step forward, and knelt beside the small desk which was upon the floor.

In a second he had drawn out the document which Helene had given to Pedro Gomez, and which she stole away from him before turning his insensible form over to the dark-visaged men who were in waiting in the secret room—the written agreement of Helene Cercey to give the gardener, at the end of fifteen years, either half her fortune or her hand in marriage.

"*Caramba!* I have it!" he hissed, as he glanced over the paper, and then secreted it in one of the capacious pockets of his coat.

"Ha! ha! You say it is no business of mine, eh? Wait! Oho! we'll see. You have not yet done with Carlos Mendoza! What a prize for Cortez! Ho!"

When Helene returned she found the Quack just draining a glass of wine, over which he nodded, then smacked his lips, then thought:

"That is the wine of which Pedro Gomez drank. She has drugged it admirably."

Helene Cercey had observed his movement. Her brilliant eyes lighted up strangely. What if she should persuade him to drink more—to get under the influence of the powerful drug his own hand had prepared?—and then rid herself of him in some way; thus completely obliterating all possible chances of a discovery of her recent actions. For she felt that Carlos Mendoza must know of nearly all, if not all, she had done, and such knowledge was menacing to her.

"Here is your money," handing him the amount. "I thank you, too, for the services you have rendered me."

"Madame may always call upon me with safety," stowing carefully away the roll of bills she had given him.

"I will not need you further," she said, "and so, let us part on good terms. There is wine. Drink."

"Madame is generous. Oh, how sociable!"

Old Carlos grinned, and his serpent-eyes twinkled.

"Drink," Helen urged.

"Oh, how very sociable in madame!"

"What do you mean by that tone, Carlos Mendoza?"

Placing one finger to the side of his hooked nose, and half-closing one eye:

"Keep your wine, my beautiful belle! Carlos Mendoza is too wide awake to be tricked by his own manufactures! He! he! he! You have drugged that wine remarkably well. I tasted it. But, never fear—it won't harm me. See this." He displayed on the end of his tongue a small sugar-coated pill, which he had placed in his mouth immediately upon drinking the wine.

Helene bit her lip, but said nothing.

"Good-evening, madame. You have paid me well. But, malediction! you would have

poisoned me. How ungrateful! There—no matter; I forget it. He! he! he! Good-evening again, madame," and the short, slim, snaky form glided noiselessly out at the door.

For a moment she stood still—only a moment; then she stepped quickly forward and glanced out into the hall.

But, even in that brief space, the Quack had vanished.

"Carlos Mendoza is very shrewd. He suspected my intentions at once. He carries antidotes in his pockets. Could he have heard or seen what passed between Pedro Gomez and I? Poh! I am growing silly, to worry over imaginary distrusts. Now—Ah, that document I wrote for Pedro Gomez. I must destroy it."

She turned to the small writing-desk. While looking for the paper, she continued:

"Pedro Gomez has disappeared forever, now, if those men act promptly. May they, too, get a sting from the asp with which I told them to poison the gardener. Ha! where can that paper be? I'm sure I put it in here; I—" she paused and stared at the floor, as if a sudden thought struck her.

Then she arose hurriedly, and rung the bell.

Ola appeared.

"Tell Mijo to have my carriage brought around at once. Do you hear, Ola?—at once!"

"Yes, my lady."

"Be quick!"

And when the girl hastened to execute the order, Helene walked to and fro, frowning, clinching her white fists, and hissing:

"Carlos Mendoza is a thief! He has taken that paper from my desk. I am sure I put it there, and no one but Carlos Mendoza has been in this room since. How uncircumspect of me!"

When the carriage was ready, she entered it, ordered the driver to a house three pavements beyond the shop of Mendoza, the Quack, and in a few seconds was speeding away in the direction of Willow street.

When she alighted, the carriage moved off—to return at the expiration of half an hour.

The shop of Carlos Mendoza was closed. But Helene, familiar with the place, entered a side passage that led to the rear office.

As she entered the door, she heard voices in animated conversation.

One voice said:

"Malediction!"

And another voice said:

"*Caramba!*"

She paused to listen; then stooped to peer in through the keyhole.

CHAPTER XIII.

HELENE CERCEY HEARS SOMETHING.

CARLOS MENDOZA and his son, Cortez, were seated at the round table in the small rear room.

The latter was holding up, in the light of a tall, flaring lamp, the Star of Diamonds; and the Quack was gazing on it in wonder and delight.

"And this is what she told Wart Gomez about," Cortez was saying. "The Star of Diamonds, with an unlucky history, and which always brings trouble to its possessor. Now, whether to keep it—"

"Ho! what? malediction! we will keep it. Throw away those diamonds?—those beautiful diamonds? How could we?"

"But, old man, you forget the history I have been telling you."

It was evident that Helene Cercey had missed a very important part of the conversation.

"The history? *Caramba!* We will tear the thing to pieces, and sell the brilliants. Let me have it, Cortez!—let me have it." He took the star in his hands, and turned it over and over, muttering and chuckling to himself in his supreme satisfaction.

The young man appeared rather gloomy.

"Ho, Cortez! How beautiful!—how valuable! A fortune! He! he! he! he!"

"Keep it to yourself, then. I want none of its fates tangling round me."

"What makes you so sour? Pooh! pooh! we're in luck; so be merry."

He twirled and tumbled the star round and round in his skinny fingers, while he continued to mutter and chuckle—this avaricious old Spaniard, who sold quack medicines to

hide his real mode of living, which was mostly after the manner in which we have seen him deal with Helene Cercey.

"You forget again, old man," Cortez rested his elbows on the table, and sunk his chin to his hands, while he stared frowningly at the opposite wall.

"Forget what?"

"That there has been a murder done, together with the obtaining of that star—perhaps two murders. Ha! I heard a noise."

He started to his feet as if stung by a serpent, and looked quickly around.

"You are nervous, my boy. Sit down. Well, if there has been murder, that does you no hurt."

"But, Carline Mandoro?—for she will always be Carline Mandoro to me, if she did marry Gomez."

"Well, if she is dead, too?—what matter?"

"Matter enough—"

"It cannot implicate you."

"Malediction! But it can!" cried Cortez, in sudden excitement, and bringing his fist down, with a thump, on the table. "It can implicate me, old man, and I am worried about it, more than you can understand."

"How?" asked Carlos, returning his son's stare.

"*Caramba!* Do you not see? Carline Mandoro was my sweetheart. Her husband, Gomez, has been murdered—she was carried off, and then disappeared. If some one should say: 'Look—Cortez Mendoza, mad at the man who married his sweetheart, murdered that man, then abducted and killed Carline Mandoro, out of revenge!'—then what? Eh? Malediction!"

"But you did not kill Wart Gomez! You did not touch Carline Mandoro!"

"True enough! But—*caramba!*—that will not count. I shall be arrested on suspicion. I have enemies who would perjure themselves to drag me down. Satan! can you not see, now? I will be tried for the abduction and murder of Carline Mandoro!"

"Pooh! pooh! who will start the ridiculous story?"

"There are plenty, if they once think of the scheme. It is best for me to leave these parts, I guess."

"Malediction!—no. I have another sweetheart for you. He! he! he!—a finer one—a very queen."

"What do you mean, old man?"

"I have another sweetheart for you, my boy; and she is far prettier than was Carline Mandoro. Ho! h-o! and she is a prize—a prize! You must not think of going away. As to your enemies?—booh! They will not have brains enough to avail themselves of what you fear. Nobody will start the story. Rest easy. Ah! who can that be?"

They were interrupted by a knock at the door.

At a sign from his father, Cortez withdrew.

Old Carlos placed the star in the box, closed the lid, and advanced to admit the comer.

Helene entered.

"Oho!" thought the Quack, "it is the beautiful belle! She said she would not need me further, yet she is here within the hour. She has missed the document. That is it! she is here to demand it of me. Let us see if she will get it. He! he! he! he!"

And then aloud: "Walk in, madame! This is unexpected. How can I serve you this time?"

The beauty observed with satisfaction that the box containing the Star of Diamonds lay upon the table.

When she saw the jewel, as she eaves-dropped and peered in through the keyhole, she had resolved to secure it; for she perceived that it was costly, and was immediately seized with a desire to own such a valuable ornament—to secure it by any means.

"Be seated, madame," continued Mendoza, in his squeakily-bland voice.

"I have urgent business with you," Helene said, seating herself at the table on the side opposite the box—opposite because she did not wish to excite a suspicion of her intentions.

"I am always ready to serve, madame. Now, what is it, eh?"

He stood before her, rubbing his hands slowly, while the little black eyes twinkled cunningly.

"I have come to demand back the paper which you took from my writing-desk."

Helene spoke sharply.

"The paper! what paper? Madame speaks in—"

"You would say 'in riddles.' Be done! You stole that paper from me, Carlos Mendozé; now return it."

"He! he! he!" laughed the Quack—a giggling chuckle. "Malediction! Madame missed it soon. Yes—I have it safe. No fear of that! Safe!"

"Safe?"

"Oho! safe enough."

"Can I bribe you, Carlos Mendozé? A thousand dollars if you will give me that paper."

"A thousand? Pish!"

"Two thousand."

"Pish again!"

"Why do you trifle? The paper can be of no use to you. Let me have it and I am willing to pay handsomely for it."

"No use to me, eh? Ho! Wait! We'll see. Cortez!—Cortez, my boy! come here," he called loudly.

"Did you call me, old-man?"

Cortez came in. He had been standing just outside the door, listening.

"Yes! yes! ho! ho! h-o! I have something to tell you—something about the beautiful belle who buys poison, and drugs, and asps, and love-powders—"

"Carlos Mendozé!" broke in Helene, knitting her brows ominously.

"Easy! easy, madame. Malediction! You are in a trap. He! he! he! Cortez, my boy, I have a paper which she says is of no use to me. Oho! we shall see. Listen, Cortez, while I tell you something. Here's your new sweetheart come to see you—the new-comer I spoke of. He! he! he! Isn't this a fine exchange?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VALUE OF THE PAPER.

WHILE the Quack giggled and chuckled, he went to the door, locked it and placed the key in his pocket.

Helene silently watched him the frown on her lovely face growing darker, and her eyes flashing sternly beneath the knitted brows.

She did not like the tone nor speech of Carlos Mendozé. She did not like the significance of that movement, which plainly meant:

"Now, my beautiful belle, you are a close prisoner with us; and you must listen, whether you choose or not, to what I am going to say."

Cortez did not understand. He saw that his father was exuberant over something; he saw that this exuberance was angering their visitor.

Why old Carlos should say that she, Helene Cercy, was the new sweetheart mentioned in their recent conversation, was more than the young man could conceive—for, Helene was an entire stranger to him, and the Quack had not yet made a confidant of his son, so far as to tell him of the purchases made by the belle at the dingy shop.

Cortez, therefore, was filled with surprise, and gazed in blankness and inquiry from one to the other of the two.

"Carlos Mendozé, why did you lock that door?" demanded Helene, angrily.

"Wait! Ho! ho! we'll see presently. I want to tell you how valuable this paper is to me. Oh, how very valuable!—and you say it is worthless."

"Unlock the door, sir!"

"Sit down, Cortez—sit down," ordered Carlos. "Malediction! I have something important to speak of. Ho! ho! ho!"

"What does all this mean, old man?"

"A great deal, my boy—a great deal! He! he! he! Laugh! Laugh! This beautiful belle is to be the wife of my son! Ho! h-o!"

"Carlos Mendozé! Wretch—what do you mean by that insult?"

Helene half-started from her chair, and her orbs lighted with redoubled anger as they riveted staringly on the giggling, chuckling, exuberant Quack.

Cortez strained his ears and listened in amaze.

"Quiet! Quiet!" old Carlos ordered, still laughing slowly. "Listen, Cortez! You heard of Florose Earncliffe?—the beautiful, of Florose Earncliffe?—the beautiful, of Esplanade street?"

"Yes—she died—"

"Ho! no—she was poisoned!"

"Poisoned?"

"Carlos Mendozé, what are you doing?" cried Helene, breathing quick and fast.

But, Carlos paid her no heed, and continued, addressing his son:

"Yes, yes, she was murdered—poisoned, do you hear? Poisoned by this beautiful belle here, whose name is Helene Cercy—eh, madame?"

The young man looked in astonishment toward Helene.

"Yes, Cortez; she was the rival of Florose. Florose must be removed, because Helene wanted her lover, Dwyer Allison. Oh, I know all about it! He! he! But she must have means and a tool. She first buys poison of me, and then finds a tool in Pedro Gomez, the gardener of Elser Earncliffe, and the father of Wart Gomez. Ho! A nice plot, eh? A nice plot!"

"Yes. Malediction!" exclaimed Cortez, now grinning with his father.

"So, Florose was removed. Elser Earncliffe could not survive the shock. Both father and daughter were removed. But, what did she do next? *Caramba!* What did she do with Pedro Gomez, her tool? She called him to her house to-night, drugged him, and then turned him over to some rascals who were to sting him with an asp—the asp, too, she got of me!—Hoh-o!"

"Hoh-o!" echoed Cortez, unconsciously.

"Through the keyhole I saw her with Pedro—"

"Curse him! I feared as much!" thought Helene, while she remained silent during the Quack's outburst.

"—For she had sent to me for a love-powder, and I had gone with the powder, unseen by the servants, to her private apartments. Malediction! what a plot."

"Yes. Malediction! Ha! ha! ha!"

"She had written and signed an agreement to either marry Pedro Gomez or give him half her fortune, after fifteen years. Through the keyhole I saw her place this paper in a small desk, when she turned poor Pedro over to the ruffians. And now I have got the paper! And she says it is of no use to me! Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! h-o!"

Old Carlos bent his slim form nearly double, and laughed in his glee, truly hideous.

"I think I see what you are driving at, old man."

"So do I," Helene thought to herself, while a peculiar, contemptuous smile played about her tightly-compressed lips.

"You see, Cortez, my boy?—ho! ho!—you see? I have the written agreement of Helene Cercy, to marry, after fifteen years—not Pedro Gomez, but Cortez Mendozé! for we can easily erase the name, and insert a new one. *Caramba!* *Caramba!* how good."

"Yes—*caramba!*—it is very good," laughed the son.

The young Spaniard was already in love with the face before him, and at prospect of marrying one so beautiful, his whole passionate nature was aroused.

"You mean, then, Carlos Mendozé, that I am to marry your son?"

The question was put very calmly, the speaker was not at all disconcerted.

"That is it! That is it!"

"And if I refuse—"

"If you refuse? Malediction! I will expose all your tricks—your crimes."

"I am not afraid of that," was Helene's mental comment. "Carlos Mendozé cannot betray me, without implicating himself, and he will suffer equally with me, in the event of the exposure he threatens. He thinks I will not see this. I might astonish him by telling him how easy it would be for me to bring the officers of the law to his house, in search of the abductor and murderer of Caroline Mandoro. But, it would not be sensible for me to do that now, while I am locked in this room, and in their power. I must, first, get out of this. Let them go on. When they measure weapons with Helene Cercy, they will have to fight hard and shrewdly." Then aloud:

"Very well, Carlos Mendozé; you have me in your power, so I must yield."

"She is a magnificent woman! I love her wildly!" Cortez was saying, inwardly.

"It is well! It is well!" laughed the Quack. "Cortez will make you a good husband."

Now, do you not think this paper is worth something to me? Salute your sweetheart, Cortez! Kiss her! Ho! ho! ho!"

"Keep off!" ordered Helene, as the young man advanced with the apparent intention of kissing her. "Let it suffice, for the present, that I yield to your demands. Cortez will have embraces and kisses enough when we are married."

As she spoke—while her bosom was turmoil and burning with rage, hate, chagrin, contempt—she even smiled pleasantly on the young Spaniard.

"I will wait," said Cortez, bowing.

Then was her time. Cortez was bowing so that he could not see her; old Carlos was unlocking the door; and, unobserved, she snatched up the box containing the precious Star of Diamonds, and thrust it out of sight in the folds of her dress.

"There you are!" whined Mendozé, senior. "Your captivity is over. You are wise. You are politic. Cortez will make you a good husband. So, it is understood, eh? You are the betrothed of my son Cortez."

"He is a handsome man," Helene said, smiling, and turning her lustrous eyes on the young man; "I have no doubt we shall get along happily. Moreover, I have no alter-native—"

"None!" declared the Quack, chuckling anew—"none whatever!"

"Therefore, we understand each other. And may I go, now?"

"Oh, yes—go! He! he! he! There's the door wide for you."

"Stay," interposed Cortez. "May I call upon you, to-morrow evening, Helene Cercy?"

"Certainly. I will be glad to see you, Cortez—to-morrow evening."

"But, he must not drink any wine, nor eat any fruit, nor smell of roses in your house! *Caramba!*" put in Carlos, meaningly.

"I shall expect you, Cortez."

"I will come."

He bowed gallantly as she swept past him; and when she was gone, he turned to old Carlos, with:

"Malediction! I am mad with love for her!"

"Oho! did I not say I had a pretty sweetheart in store for you?"

"*Caramba!* how beautiful!"

"Yes—yes; and a prize! This rival of Florose Earncliffe—with thousands and thousands of dollars, and so beautiful—ho! ho! what a prize!"

"Yes, a prize—What ails you, old man?"

Carlos had uttered a sudden cry.

"The box! The box! She has stolen it! Oh! oh! my beautiful diamonds!"

"Malediction!"

Carlos would have dashed after her. But Cortez detained him.

"No. Let her keep the accursed thing. It would only bring us ill luck."

"But the diamonds! the diamonds!" he howled, moving his slim body up and down in the other's hold, and gesticulating wildly.

"Let them go."

"They are worth thousands!"

"I care not if they are worth millions—that would not save us from its fates. Let it go, I say—let it go!"

"But I wanted it for you, Cortez! The money it would bring!—think of that."

"Devil's ducats!" grunted Cortez. "I want none of it! Besides, we can stipulate for it in that document you spoke of. What matter, after all? It will eventually come back, when I marry the pretty thief. Do you think she will wed me, old man?" the question thoughtfully asked.

"*Caramba!* of course she will. She cannot refuse—dare not refuse!"

"True. We have her in a tight trap."

"Come now, we'll fix the paper, since she has escaped by this time with the star."

Mendozé drew forth the document which he had stolen from the small desk at Helene Cercy's house, and spread it on the table.

And while the Quack proceeded to arrange for the erasure, by chemicals, of Pedro's name, Cortez busied himself with glancing over the agreement that was to give him Helene Cercy for a wife.

"Malediction!" he exclaimed, in an undertone. "I will not wait fifteen years—nor fifteen months! She shall marry me at once. Ho, there, Farak!"

He rung the bell, and ordered the negro to bring a fresh bottle from the wine closet; after which he seated himself to think—no more of Carline Mandoro, and his fears—but of his new prospects and the enchanting girl who, he resolved, should be his wife within a month; no further delay than that.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CLAWS OF THE BEAUTIFUL TIGRESS.

WE go again to the tapestried room at Helene Cercy's residence, in the early evening of the day following her visit to the Quack.

At the moment, the beauty was near the center of the apartment, facing a servant who was standing in the doorway. In one hand she held a card.

When she read the name, she glanced up, and said:

"Admit him. Usher him to this room."

"Yes, my lady."

The man thought it singular that his mistress should make it a point, of late, to receive visitors in her private apartments; for the tapestried room was certainly private, by her own orders. Only Ola, her maid, knew that she frequently enjoyed a cigarette in here, where there was no fear of intrusion, and hence no possibility of her habit becoming known.

Not that she was afraid to have the fact of her indulgence leak out—for there were many women in her own circle who enjoyed the vice of smoking; but because she chose, rather, to keep her doings covered.

Moreover, this was the same servant who had seen Pedro Gomez enter there the night before; and he wondered when that visitor—whichever he was—had gone out—if he had gone out at all, and if he had not gone out, then what had become of him?

But, for reasons, he kept his wonderment to himself. He knew that if he evinced a desire to probe the affairs of his mistress, he would be immediately discharged; and no one in Helene Cercy's employ would wish to leave her, as she always dealt kindly with her servants and paid them liberally.

In a few moments the visitor was ushered in, and this visitor was Cortez Mendoza, the son of the Quack.

Helene had been expecting him.

A luxurious sofa—or, rather, a long ottoman—had been pushed forward, and beside it stood the small mosaicked table, containing fruit and wine.

Helene smiled pleasantly as he entered. She had dressed richly to receive him.

Cortez looked exceedingly handsome. She almost felt a passion for the young man, as she met the deep glance of his brilliant eyes; and while she gave him her hand in greeting, and led him to the ottoman-sofa, she thought:

"What a comely lover for some gay senorita! I am half in love with his handsome face myself."

And Cortez, as he feasted his eyes on her beauty:

"Malediction! What a lovely creature! Wait fifteen years for this prize? *Caramba!* No. I'll marry her within a month."

"Be seated, Cortez. I have been lonesome while waiting for my fiancée. But I feel better now. Here is wine. Let us drink and be merry."

"*Caramba!*" he thought. "She begins early. The old man warned me not to drink in her house, nor eat of anything, nor smell of roses." And aloud: "Thanks—but you will pardon my refusal."

"I see," said Helene, very unconcernedly; "you have been advised by your father not to touch anything I may offer you. Have no fears, Cortez; I mean you no harm. How could I?—the man I have consented to marry! See," and he drained a wine-glass as she spoke.

"Malediction!" mentally. "If that is drugged or poisoned, she has a dose of it, too. So I will try some—drink only when she drinks, and be on my guard."

Cortez drank.

"Now," said he, "to begin with: you have stolen something from us, Helene Cercy."

"I?"

"Oh, you know—that Star of Diamonds."

"Ha! ha! ha! Yes, Cortez, I have stolen it. And I wish you to let me keep it for awhile. It is very pretty."

"Malediction! You may keep it for fifteen

years. See here; we have altered the document nicely. It reads, that, after fifteen years, you shall either marry Cortez Mendoza, or give him half your fortune, or restore the Star of Diamonds."

He drew the document from his pocket, and held it up before her—held it warily beyond her reach, however. And when she had glanced at it and seen how cleverly the father and son had altered it to suit their purpose, he put it away again, with an air of satisfaction.

"But I do not propose to wait so long," he declared, with a nod and a smile.

"What did you say, Cortez?" Helene was idly picking at the fruit.

"I say I will not wait for fifteen years. Malediction! you are too beautiful to wait for! I must have you at once. I care nothing for your money; and as for the star—I would not have the accursed jewel if you were to give it to me this minute."

"Why not, Cortez?" she inquired, surprised at this declaration and its earnestness.

"That star was once the property of your grandfather."

"Of my grandfather?"

"Yes. It is a fatal possession. It has a history of evil, and I want none of it."

"Will you explain, Cortez?" asked Helene, in genuine astonishment.

Cortez Mendoza then narrated the history of the Star of Diamonds, though with fewer words than Carline had used when she made the revelation to her husband, Wart Gomez, on the night of the latter's assassination.

"So you see," he added, in conclusion, "I want nothing to do with it. I am unlucky enough so far, until I met you; now I am lucky Cortez Mendoza."

"Yes, you are very lucky, Cortez."

"I do not want the star; I do not want your money, so you must marry me."

"Of course. That is understood. That is a very singular story you have been telling me, Cortez," eating leisurely of the fruit.

"You must be my wife within a month," he pursued.

"Within a month, Cortez?"

"That is what I said."

"But you are sudden—"

"No matter."

"I cannot prepare in that time. My trousseau!"

"Bother the trousseau! Malediction! I will attend to that very quickly."

"And you will not wait longer?"

"No longer than a month. Malediction! You do not know how beautiful you are, else you would not wonder at my haste."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! And you are determined?"

"Yes, determined."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! I do not think you will marry me in a month, Cortez."

"You do not!—why?" He spoke sharply and glanced at her keenly, for there was a peculiar strain to her words, to her laugh, which grated on his ears.

"I do not think you will marry me at all, Cortez Mendoza. Helene Cercy is not for you!"

With the cry she made a sudden movement, grasping him by the collar, and turned him completely over. Quick as a flash her white hands closed round his throat, and with one knee planted on his breast she held him down.

"It is time! it is time!" she screamed.

"Malediction!" snorted the Spaniard, struggling and straining every muscle to release himself—in vain.

Her action was so sudden as to take him utterly by surprise and at a disadvantage; and there must have been a marvelous strength in her smoothly-rounded arms, for she held him firmly despite his frantic writhing, while she cried out:

"It is time! it is time!"

The words were a signal.

From the secret room issued forth the same wolf-visaged men who had made off with Pedro Gomez.

"Take him off! Off with him!" ordered Helene.

But they were startled by a rapid knocking at the door.

For a second the men paused, and Helene relaxed the tightness of her grip.

"*Caramba!*" roared Cortez.

With one mighty effort he shook her off, and darted toward the secret door.

"After him! He will escape after all!"

The ruffians dashed forward.

But Cortez saw the trap that had been set for him. Remembering certain impressive warnings he had received from his father, before visiting the belle, and perceiving the tools that had been in waiting for the signal, he feared—and reasonably—for his life.

With the cursing, growling men at his heels, he bounded across the dark room that was beyond the drapery.

At the window, he swung himself out. To his surprise and delight, he brushed against a rope ladder that was fastened to the sill, and by which means these ruffians were accustomed to gain ingress. Down this ladder he went in a twinkling. In a few seconds he was scaling the garden wall.

"Malediction!" he exclaimed, as he stretched his legs in a swift run, gave one glance back at the window, and fled, hatless, through the streets.

But the ruffians did not pursue him beyond the garden-wall.

When Helene Cercy opened the door, to see who was there, another card was handed to her.

"*Dwyr Allison*," she read; then said, "I will be down presently. Show him into the *salon* at the back."

"Yes, my lady."

The servant departed with mouth agape. He had glanced into the tapestried room, and saw no sign of the visitor he had ushered in there a short time before!

CHAPTER XVI.

HELENE CERCY'S LOVE.

THE note dispatched to Dwyr Allison, on the day previous, had brought the young man this evening to the house of Helene Cercy.

He was leaning against the mantelpiece, gazing absently down at the "charms" on his watch-chain, with which he toyed while awaiting her.

His handsome face was very pale and sad; it was evident that the loss of Florose, on the eve of her wedding, had been to him a heart-blow.

Helene came in presently.

Her face wore its sweetest smile; she was more radiant than he had ever before seen her.

"Dwyr?"

"Well, Helene?"

They had long ago dropped the formal prefix.

"I'm glad you've come. Be seated."

"Let me thank you, Helene, for the kind sympathy of your note."

"I feared you would not believe me sincere," she said, as they turned to one of the rich *tetes*.

"Why?" surprisedly.

"Dwyr—" she hesitated, but the brilliant eyes did not vary from their gaze into his, "why did you desert me?"

"Desert you?"

"You seem to forget: this is the first time you have called upon me for a whole month."

"Helene—" and he hesitated now, "at one time you may have thought I loved you."

"I did."

"And you were right; though I believed that I had not betrayed my affection. I did love you, Helene, and it was while too weak to tell of it, through fear that you might reject me, that something happened to destroy all my desire to possess you."

Helene colored, but remained silent.

"I did not intend to speak of this; but you have questioned me. You ask me why I deserted you. Do you remember the *soiree* of three months ago?"

"Yes," very lowly.

"I was dancing with Florose. You were on the balcony, looking at us through the window. What did you say to yourself, as you watched us?"

"Nothing that I can recollect."

"Your memory fails you—perhaps purposely. You said, and you frowned darkly, too—'I wish she was dead!' You meant Florose."

"Who told you that? It is—"

"Hold; it is true. My valet was within three feet of you, at the time. He saw the look of hate you darted at Florose; he heard those vindictive words—almost a

know it is true. Florose never harmed you, Helene."

The young man spoke very earnestly; his eyes were fixed fully on her beautiful face, and their glance volumed far more of the reproach than his words contained.

"Dwyr, you are mistaken. Florose did harm me!"

"Impossible! She was all gentleness, ay, more: among all her friends there was not one for whom she felt a deeper friendship than for you, though you were her rival. Florose could not have harmed you."

"I tell you, she thrust a dagger into my bosom when she stole you from me! You start, Dwyr? Listen to me: while you were loving me in silence, I was yearning for that love—dying to hear you speak it! My heart had long been yours, though I concealed my passion more successfully—waiting till you should tell me of your love, when I would pour out mine! Stop: hear me further. I must tell this now. A love like mine has been, and is, will not be chained to silence by any of society's stilted laws; too many hopes have been wrecked, and lives made unhappy, by this iron grip of rigid formality, and the sword-pricking opinions of brainless people who denounce it as unmaidenly, wrong, ruinous, for a woman to betray her affections unasked. I will not have my tongue manacled by this unrighteous code. The great God who gave you your heart gave me mine—with the same susceptibilities, yearnings, passions, ambitions and chords of feeling; and it is woman's right to strive for an object of that heart's worship, as well as man's! I asked you here, to-night, to lay bare my secret. I love you—love you dearly, Dwyr!"

Her dark orbs were burning with the fire and ardor of her more woman nature, unbridled in love, as it was in hate; and her lovely face was glowing while she made the confession and argued the justness of her freedom.

"You called me to you for that, Helene?" he asked, very calmly.

"Yes, Dwyr, for that. You say you have loved me—do you not love me now?"

"Helene—"

"Florose can no longer claim you; she is dead. Let love, like hate, perish at the grave—though you may regret the loss."

"Helene, I do not love you," rising as he spoke.

She stepped quickly to his side.

"You do not mean that?"

"Yes. When Florose died, I buried all my love with her—there is none left. The world will always have a desolate look to me. But you pain me sorely, Helene; let me depart at once."

"Dwyr"—and the voice of this strange girl, for once, was tremulous—"do you reject my love?"

Her whole soul, at the moment, was in the lowly-uttered question. She was breathing hard; and there was a wildness of expression in her grandly-beautiful features as she stood there, with heart throbbing, and hearing strained.

"I repeat, Helene, this is painful to me. Had I foreseen this, I never would have come here. I am sorry to hear you say what you have. I can never love you. Let me take my departure."

He bowed icily—then walked from the apartment.

She stood like a statue—her fists, as was her wont, clinched till the pink nails sunk into the flesh, and the bare, white arms straight and stiff at her sides. Her teeth were tightly shut, and her eyes flashed as she stared after his departing form.

"Go, then!—go!" she panted, when she heard the front door close; "go, Dwyr Allison! and may the curse of Helene Cercey go with you! There was one soft, pure spot in my heart, only waiting and longing for your love, to make me better than I am. But you have crushed it out; you have trampled under foot the fondest hope of my life, the sole endeavor of my ambition. I hate you now! I hate you!—and may every curse in a human's path make your existence one term of everlasting misery!"

Helene returned to the tapestried apartment.

One of her ruffian tools was in waiting.

"Well, Nio?"—as she entered, and closed the door.

"Did you catch him?"

"No!" was the blunt, half-sullen reply.

"Never mind. Listen to me now: we have not yet done with this young Spaniard, Cortez Mendoza. You still have a chance to earn your money, if you will do as I bid you. Now, I have a plan for his destruction—a bold plan. For he must be removed. He is a dangerous enemy of mine. Now draw your chair nearer, Nio."

Whatever that plan was, it caused the ruffian to start and stare, and look incredulous, while he uttered sundry exclamations of astonishment as Helene explained her intentions.

As Dwyr Allison left the house of the belle, a shadow darted across his path.

The form of a woman garbed in black, and whose face was pale as death, brushed his garments, and startled him with its sudden and unexpected presence.

He would have hurried on; but, ere he had taken a dozen steps, this spectral figure glided back to his side, and laid a hand upon his arm.

"What do you want?" he demanded, recoiling suspiciously from her touch.

"You," was the brief answer, in a strange, mysterious voice.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Zerline Nanez."

"Then I do not know you—"

"But I have business with you."

"Well?"

"Would you like to know who poisoned Florose Earncliffe?"

"Ha!"

"Ah! you will listen now?"

"How do you know that she was poisoned?"

"Some other time I will tell you. We have mutual interests, Dwyr Allison; or, at least, they can be made so. I have a deep wrong to avenge—so have you. My enemy is a man—yours is a woman. If you will take my task, I will take yours; it will be man to man, and woman to woman. You loved Florose Earncliffe. If I show you her poisoner, and swear to haunt that poisoner with threatenings of justice, will you swear to act the same toward the murderer of my husband?"

"Woman—"

"Be quick, sir! Is it a bargain?"

"It is! I will swear to aid you in any vengeance of your own, if you can prove to me that Florose was poisoned, and show me—"

"Enough. You are a man of honor and I take our compact as sealed. The murderess of Florose Earncliffe lives there!" She pointed to the house of Helene Cercey.

"What?"

"It is true—and I will prove it. Helene Cercey is the murderess of your betrothed. Now, come with me. I will tell you more of myself. You see this?—it was done by the dagger that destroyed the life of my husband!"

Dwyr Allison, almost involuntarily, went with her. He yielded to an inexplicable prompting.

And as they moved away, and she uttered the closing words of her speech, she threw aside a portion of her hood—disclosing a red, frightful gash across the neck, that told of a fierce knife-cut.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ARREST.

"MALEDICTION!"

The exclamation was a growl, direfully deep; the voice was that of Cortez Mendoza.

The young Spaniard was hurrying along Perdido street, having just left the American Theater.

Exactly two weeks had passed since Cortez escaped the claws of the beautiful tigress—since Helene's whispered conversation with her ruffian tool in the tapestried room—since Dwyr Allison's rejection of the passionate beauty's love, and his encounter with the mysterious figure—who called herself Zerline Nanez—on the pavement before Helene's house.

The night was a dark one, with gustful wind and murky atmosphere. Banks of clouds rolled heavily across the sky; and occasionally the moon, which struggled behind its watery shrouding, would break the gloomy airs by darting a momentary gleam between the mist rents.

Cortez Mendoza was walking fast, to reach his home before the fall of the rain.

Behind him, shadowy, spectral, ghostly, came a tall form dogging at his heels—a man who seemed determined to keep him in sight, and whose persistency called forth the exclamation:

"Malediction!"

It was not the simple fact of his being followed on this occasion that made young Cortez growl. For ten days, he had noticed that, wherever he went, there was a tall man in pursuit of him—always at a certain distance, always watching him; and while it annoyed him, it made him angry.

At one time, this individual who haunted him was in the character of a fruit-vender; next it was in the garb of a common laborer; then in the dress of a fashionable Englishman; finally—and on this night—as a Spanish dare-devil, with curling mustache, browned features, and piercing eyes.

But Cortez knew the form, in any guise. He knew that this party was keeping him under surveillance. He had sat near him at the theater; he had elbowed close, in the crowd, after the performance.

Now, as he strode along Perdido street, he chanced to glance over his shoulder, and perceived, immediately, that the tall figure was there, timing his footsteps, dogging him as usual; and he blurted, snarlingly:

"Malediction! Who is this? What is he after? I am tired of his presence! I must be rid of him, for he makes me nervous. *Caramba!*—you owl. I'll teach you some manners." With the words, he glided suddenly into a black alley, and stood close to the wall, waiting the other's approach.

And while he waited, he drew a knife from his bosom.

The tall form came on at increased speed, fearing he had lost the object of pursuit. As he wheeled around the corner of the alley, the hand of Cortez Mendoza clutched his throat.

"*Caramba!* you dog. Now I have you!"

Not another word passed.

A fierce struggle ensued.

The bright blade of the knife circled in the air; there was a low groan, and a body sunk down in the darkness.

"God help me!" was all the tall form uttered.

"Now then! Malediction!"

Cortez, with a grim smile, continued on his way, gritting his teeth in satisfaction.

Soon he reached his father's shop.

Entering by the side passage, he found old Carlos in the rear room.

But he paused and looked in astonishment.

The Quack was walking to and fro, muttering, moaning; and at sight of his son, he uttered a sharp, whining cry that was enigmatical.

"My boy! my boy! Oh! oh!"

"What's the matter, old man?"

"Oh, Cortez! my dear Cortez! We are ruined!"

"Ruined? *Caramba!* what do you mean by that?"

"Fly! Fly for your life! We are ruined!—ruined! O-h!"

"Fly? What has happened? Malediction! I was just thinking of doing that. I have killed a man to night!—a fool that has been tripping after me, like a shadow, for ten days past. As we struggled, one of his fingers gouged in my mouth, and I wrenched off this wring with my teeth," and he tossed a ring on the table, as he spoke.

Carlos did not take any notice of the ring. And Cortez repeated:

"Tell me what has happened?"

"Oh! oh! we are lost—you are lost! Read that, Cortez!"

He handed his son a letter-sheet; and as Cortez viewed it, he muttered, half-aloud, in some curiosity:

"What's this? Who can be writing letters that throw the old man into fits, and make his tongue wag like a fool's? And they use green ink. Ho! that's odd—green ink. Now, what do they say?"

But he interrupted himself by venting a half-howl. The note was for Cortez Mendoza, and it ran as follows:

"Murderer of Wart Gomez!—beware! Justice is on your track!—you are not so safe as you suppose yourself to be. You may fly from ocean to ocean, or north, or south; but the curse of your deeds shall follow you swiftly, and the Green Shadow will haunt you to the grave!"

"Malediction!" he roared. "What is the 'Green Shadow'?—here is green ink! Where did you get this?" turning to his excited father.

"I came in an hour ago, and as I came in, I passed a man on the pavement, who wore a green mask over his features—a very small man."

"A small man!" echoed Cortez Mendoza, staring.

"Entering this room, I found the note there, on the table, lying open. Fly, Cortez!—fly! All is lost!—we are ruined!"

"Luck of perdition!—I will fly! I have no time to lose! What I feared has happened. The law is after me—and I am an innocent man! *Caramba!*"

He turned to rush out at the door; when that door flew open, and he was confronted by three stern-faced men.

He halted and gaped, with starting eyes.

Old Carlos fairly yelled in dismay.

"We are lost! we are lost!" screamed the Quack.

"Malediction! Silence, old man," and, to the comers: "What do you want here?"

"We want Cortez Mendoza," answered the foremost, exhibiting a pair of handcuffs.

"Ho! you want me? For what, now?"

"Oh! Oh!" groaned Carlos, who saw that the intruders were of the police force.

"We want Cortez Mendoza, on the charge of murder."

"Murder!"

"The abduction and murder of Carline Mandoro."

"It's a lie!" shrieked Carlos.

"Furies devour Carline Mandoro!" bellowed Cortez.

"Come!"

"I am innocent! If you want me—then take me!"

He whipped out his knife, and made a desperate plunge forward.

But, the three men quickly disarmed him, and slipped the bracelets on his wrists.

"You shall sweat for this!—dogs!" he hissed, as they held him firmly; and the threat issued venomously from between the teeth he gnashed in his rage.

Old Carlos was completely overcome. He sunk into a chair, rocked his shriveled body backward and forward, moaned wailfully, and cried aloud his son's innocence.

"Bear up there, old man!" snarled Cortez.

"Malediction! You are making an ass of yourself! I did not kill, nor touch at all, this Carline Mandoro—curse her! And I will prove it."

They forced the prisoner away, and left old Carlos bewailing the unlucky situation.

"Master, did you see this ring?"

The Quack started, for he thought he was alone.

Farak, the negro, was standing beside him, holding and examining the ring which Cortez had thrown on the table.

"No!" he snapped; "nor do I care to see it at all."

"There is a name in it," said the negro.

"Curse the name!—curse the name! But, what is it?"

"Dwyr Allison."

"Ho! the man Cortez says he killed! The lover of the dead Florose! But—*caramba!*—I don't care for that. Oh! Oh! they've taken my Cortez—my dear boy! They will hang him! How sad to see him with a rope around his neck! O-h! Farak—Farak—what an ungrateful world!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TIGRESS AGAIN.

BUT, Cortez Mendoza was too sanguine. Moreover, he did not know that he was the victim of a well laid plot to encompass his destruction.

And the movers in the plot worked admirably in concert, as will be seen.

We have heard Cortez Mendoza declare that he did not kill Wart Gomez, and that he did not touch Carline Mandoro—or Carline Gomez—in any way.

Whether it was or was not Cortez who entered the house of Gomez, and perpetrated the bloody deed, at all events, he was soon compelled to realize that he was in a fearful predicament.

At a preliminary trial, two days after his

imprisonment, he was overwhelmed with astonishment when a rough, uncouth, bristling-bearded man took the stand, and gave the following testimony:

"I know Cortez Mendoza well—"

"Liar! We never met before!" shouted Cortez.

"I know that he once had a sweetheart, whose name was Carline Mandoro. She deserted him, and married a man named Wart Gomez—the man who was murdered the very night of the abduction and murder of his wife, this same Carline. Cortez Mendoza, mad and wild, swore to wreak vengeance on Carline Mandoro, for her faithlessness."

"How do you know he swore this?" was the immediate question put to the witness.

"I heard him—"

"Liar again!" interrupted Cortez, red with rage, and lost in amazement.

"Where did you hear him swear it?—under what circumstances?"

"At a wine-shop," replied the witness.

"He was in liquor, and boasted to one of his companions that Carline Mandoro—he called her Carline Mandoro, though her name, then, was Carline Gomez—had once been his sweetheart."

There was a faint buzz among lookers-on. Several were present who had, themselves, heard Cortez Mendoza say that.

But, just then, one reflected that it might be possible this witness only repeated what he had read in the newspapers, which, recently, contained a full account of the affair between one Cortez Mendoza and one Wart Gomez.

"But, you said he swore to wreak vengeance on Carline Mandoro—or, Carline Gomez, as she then was."

"That was afterward, when he turned away from his companions. He said it in an undertone—but, I heard him."

"The man lies!" broke in Cortez, foaming with passion. "I did not swear, nor think of wreaking vengeance on Carline Mandoro—or Carline Gomez, as she then was, nor upon anybody else. All lies!—black lies! Malediction!"

"The prisoner will remain quiet!" thundered the official. "Now, witness, what more?"

"No more that I can remember."

"Recollect that you are giving this valuable evidence under solemn oath."

The man raised the Bible to his lips, as he had done when he took the stand.

"He is a perjurer!" exclaimed the Spaniard.

The second witness was called, duly sworn, and testified as follows:

"Know Cortez Mendoza well—"

"Another liar! *Caramba!*" sounded boisterously from the box.

Cortez could not be quieted.

"Saw Cortez Mendoza at a gambling-den, in the early evening of the night on which Carline Gomez disappeared. He was conversing with a villainous-looking fellow, who wore a slouch hat, had a bad name, and was known to carry a dagger. Heard one say: 'If Carline Mandoro interferes too much, I will give her the knife!' Could not see which one used the words, but believe the voice was that of Cortez Mendoza."

"Malediction!" thought Cortez, "they are weaving a web of blood around me! I shall swing if this goes on! *Caramba!*"

"Where is the party who received at the hands of the chief of police a warrant for the arrest of Cortez Mendoza?"

"Present," answered a prompt voice.

There was a slight stir near the door, and a young man came forward.

He was dressed fashionably; had short hair that curled in crisp ringlets over an uncommonly pure brow. His eyes were dark and flashing; his lips were ripe and red as a woman's; and he twirled, as if from habit, the ends of a silken mustache, which was, truly, the only masculine feature in his general appearance.

Cortez riveted his gaze upon him. There was something strangely familiar in the face—and when the youth spoke, the gazer started and seemed trying to recall to mind where he had heard the voice.

The name was Gerald Preston.

"You will state what you know about this case"—after the due form and ceremony.

"I know this Mendoza well—"

"*Caramba!* what a horde of acquaint-

ances," Cortez muttered, as he began to turn and squirm restlessly in his box.

"He has cheated me at cards, and cursed me when my pockets were empty—"

"Ho!" growled Cortez, to himself, "this is some popinjay who has lost money by me. He is spiteful, and delights to see me in this fix. He comes to swear that I am a villainous character, and just the man to be guilty of what I am accused. Malediction! I'll choke him for it when I am at liberty!"

The witness continuing:

"On the night of the abduction and murder of Carline Gomez, he had won heavily from me. I had debts to pay on the morrow, and not a penny in my purse. I followed him from the den to beg a loan—"

"When was this?"

The date given by the answer corresponded with that mentioned by the witness who had just left the stand.

"Witness, proceed."

"I say I followed after him. I saw him enter a house—the house of Wart Gomez."

"Where is the house situated?" an interruption by an old lawyer who had been importunate to secure the defendant for a client.

"On Jackson street, not far from the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad. The exact number I cannot state."

"The witness will be subject to question in due time. The uninterrupted statement is what we want now."

"After seeing Cortez Mendoza enter the house of Wart Gomez," resumed this Gerald Preston, "I heard sounds that were unmistakably those of a deadly struggle within. Was about to rush to the aid of those beset, when Cortez Mendoza dashed out, bearing a limp form in his arms. I had a casual acquaintance with Wart Gomez; had seen his wife. Knew and recognized the limp form in the arms of Cortez Mendoza as Carline, the wife of Wart Gomez. By the light that streamed through the door, I saw that her face was covered with blood, that she was insensible—if not already dead. At sight of me, and before I could act, he struck me a terrible blow between the eyes. Before I recovered, he was gone."

"Malediction!" thought Cortez, who was now turning pale, "these liars and perjurers will hang me yet!"

Close cross-questioning elicited nothing further, and also failed to discover any flaw, contradiction or inconsistencies in the testimony of the several witnesses.

The prisoner was remanded to jail, to await a final trial.

But Cortez Mendoza was staring at the last witness, as if transfixed. Under the youth's effeminate mustache he fancied he detected a slightly sarcastic smile, and the dark eyes of this Gerald Preston turned on him, for a moment, with a glance of commingled hate and triumph that he had seen before—when held down on an ottoman sofa, with two ruffians approaching, ostensibly to take his life. And more: he now perceived that the two men who had testified against him were the identical villains who had sprung out of the secret apartment adjoining the tapestried room, when Helene Cerey uttered the signaling cry:

"It is time! It is time!"

All this flashed into his mind with inconceivable rapidity, and he roared out:

"Hold, there! *Caramba!* this is a plot to destroy me. I see through it plainly. Fools that you are! that last witness is no man at all! Hear me—" but he was dragged away, and forced to be quiet, by a threat to gag him if he did not desist.

And Cortez Mendoza, behind his prison bars, strode madly about, pulling his hair, raving, cursing his ill-luck—cursing Helene Cerey; for he comprehended the plot of his situation at a glance.

"Malediction!" he howled. "She has failed to destroy me in one way, and now seeks another. But, how did she plan to accuse me of the murder of Carline Mandoro? Where did she get all her information?—half of which is false! She is a devil! She will make me swing! The tigress! I see it all!—I see! *Caramba!* How shall I fight her? It is all owing to that accursed Star of Diamonds. If I had not touched it, I would not now be here—in prison. Ho! in prison! Cortez Mendoza in prison! This is a Malediction! How am I to—"

CHAPTER XIX.

LOOSE ON THE TRAIL.

THE self-apostrophized, unfortunate Mendoze had been in confinement very high two months.

Imprisonment did not agree with him. He had lost color; his handsome face was pale and slightly haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot.

He had cursed the fates that placed him there, till his tongue tired with useless raving. He had bewailed his situation till he grew sick. He had thought upon the more than probability of these cunning enemies being able to send him to the gallows, with their lying and perjuring, till his slumbers were disturbed and made hideous with nightmares, and he half-felt the hangman's noose around his neck.

He was now sinking into a fierce apathy of despair; and this feeling was augmented by the fact that his father, the Quack, had not visited him since the night on which the three officers dragged him from the little room at the rear of the shop.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of a clear day, when, in a spirit of utter dejection, he sat on the edge of his narrow bed in the prison-cell.

His elbows were propped on his knees, his chin rested rigidly in his hands; and his eyes were distended in a vacant stare at the opposite wall, where a monstrous spider was sucking the blood from a fly that buzzed helplessly in the entanglements of the treacherous web.

For nearly two hours he had remained thus—statue like, gazing blankly, with a half-squint knitting his brows. The last rays of the parting sun streamed in at the elevated window, shining weirdly on the dirty wall; and a silence, full of strangeness, reigned in the atmosphere.

Presently, a key turned in the lock of the door, and a visitor entered.

It was Farak, the negro. In one hand he carried a small, unique box; but in the other he held a highly-colored envelope.

"Master."

The voice, the presence of the negro, seemed to restore Cortez to much of his former self. He looked up, with a start.

"Hol! Farak, is it you?"

"I, master."

"And what brings you here? Do you not see?—I am in prison. They say I am a murderer."

"Yes, master, they say so—"

"But, I am an innocent man. Malediction!" he interrupted, quickly.

"I believe it, master."

"You believe it?"

"Yes."

"Good. It is true—I am innocent. What do you come here for, Farak?"

"For two reasons; first, this." He extended the note, and bowed respectfully.

"Hal! a letter. *Caramba!* I have received a dozen since I came into this hole—all written in green ink!—all containing the same words as that which I received on the night of my arrest. Now, who is this from?"

He opened and read the missive.

"Hol! I knew it. See this! Malediction! Hear, Farak!—the note says: 'Perhaps Cortez Mendoze will not wish to measure weapons with Helene Cercy again! Let me remind him that I have promised to become his wife, after fifteen years, or give him half my fortune! Is it not a pleasant theme for a man to dwell on, who will soon be hung, and thus lose so brilliant a prospect?' I knew it! Helene Cercy was the Gerald Preston who testified, with lies, against me! Death catch her! She is a tigress, Farak! But, where did you get this?"

"From a lady in a barouche, as I came in. You may see her this moment from the window if you look."

Cortez sprang from the bed, and pressed his nose close to the bars.

He saw a barouche departing. In the barouche was a lady; she was looking up at the window; she saw him—she waved her handkerchief.

"H-a! *Caramba!* It is she! Oh! could I but catch her by the hair of her head! Malediction! Farak, she is a tigress! I could kill her!" and he danced up and down on the bed, gritting his teeth, swinging his arms, and seeming ready to dart through the bars at any moment who taunted him.

"Perhaps you will be out of this some day, master?" said Farak.

"Yes, yes, I will get out! And I will catch this Helene Cercy! I will pound her with a stick till she is black and blue, after I have made her marry me! She shall have no servants, and do all the housework herself! I will keep her busy. O-h! she shall work till her nails peel off! And I will abuse her! I will give her no rest! She shall sleep on pins, and wash in vinegar! I will paint her face with vitriol! Ha! ha! she shall howl with pain!—and I'll be worse and worse! Malediction!" and while he jumped about, gesticulating, he chuckled savagely.

"After your trial, master—"

Cortez came to the floor with a bound.

"After my trial? Say that again, and I will gouge your eyes out! My trial? Malediction! I must be out of this before my trial! There is enough evidence to hang me, first by the neck, and then by the heels! I must get out! And you must aid me, Farak."

"All in my power, master," bowing again, humbly.

"You will aid me; I shall escape; and then we will catch this tigress, Helene Cercy! Now—what is that?" he questioned, suddenly, and pointing to the box which Farak held.

"It is the Star of Diamonds."

"The Star of Diamonds?" Cortez shouted. "*Caramba!* toss it out the window. It is the cause of all my trouble. Out! but, stop: where did you get it?"

"I bring bad news, master. In explaining how I came by the box, I must tell of something for which I have shed tears."

"Bad news? Bad news for a man who is near being hanged? Hol!"

"Your father—"

"Eh?—that's it? Now, what has happened to the old man?"

"He died, three weeks ago, in a fit."

"Died in a fit!" exclaimed the Spaniard. "Malediction! Well, I'm sorry. But, he had lived long enough. You buried him decently, Farak?"

"Yes, master."

"And these dogs of jailers would not have let me know! *Caramba!*"

"When your father lay on his bed, just before the fit came on him, he called to Farak. He said he had something to send to you—"

"Good. How thoughtful! He sent me the Star of Diamonds to make more trouble. Malediction! But how did he get it from Helene Cercy?"

"It was stolen. The thief was stricken with a deadly fever—"

"Of course! Only wonder is he did not fall dead in his tracks, the moment he laid hands on it! *Caramba!* Well?"

"This thief sent for Carlos Mendoze, his friend. To him he gave the star—and your father, at his death, gave it to me, to give to you. He said it was valuable."

"Valuable?"

Cortez appeared to be thinking for a few moments. Then he said:

"On second thought, Farak, I will keep the star. Give it to me. I will hide it under the mattress. Let it make more trouble if it can."

Receiving the box from the negro, he added:

"Now, what else said the old man?"

"He also gave me this. He said you would understand."

"A diagram of the marks in the cellar," passed through the mind of Cortez, as he glanced over the parchment which Farak handed him. "I see. Instructions how to find the money he has hidden. Good. *Caramba!* He must have a trunk full of eagles buried away! I will get out of jail; I will secure the money—and with the money I will hound after Helene Cercy. I will catch her! I will devour her by bites! Malediction!" Then aloud:

"Farak, you will help me to get out of here?"

"Cheerfully, master."

"And you will stick by me?"

"Yes, master; Farak will ever be your slave, though he is given his liberty in the will of Carlos Mendoze."

"Good. We will pursue and wreak vengeance on Helene Cercy, the tigress! Come close. I have a plan. Listen, now. If you

do what I say I will soon be free. And then I will have my revenge. *Caramba!*"

Farak came closer. Cortez sat down again, with a nervous jerk on the edge of the bed, and, in a whisper, began to unfold the plan he had conceived for his escape.

Three days later.

There was a commotion among the police authorities, and the local press was alive with sensational announcements of the escape of Cortez Mendoze.

He was gone. Not the slightest clue pointed to his trail, and the detectives were at fault.

Cortez, while the excitement was at its height, was, with his faithful Farak—to whom he owed his liberty—in hot pursuit of Helene Cercy. For Helene had left New Orleans suddenly—at midnight preceding the day on which the Spaniard's absence from his cell was discovered.

Helene had discharged all her servants, converted all her possessions into available funds, and departed very hastily by steamer.

The cause of her haste will be explained anon.

And now we return to the house of the beauty, on Walnut street, Philadelphia, fifteen years subsequent to Helene's flight from New Orleans, and resume our narrative on this stormy night, with the tableau in the parlor, after the appearance and vanishment of the Green Shadow.

CHAPTER XX.

CAN IT BE?

It will be seen that Cortez Mendoze had been threatened by the Green Shadow ever since the night of his arrest in New Orleans, fifteen years prior to the date to which we now come—when he had received the letter in green ink, forewarning him of a ceaseless haunting.

We have heard Helene Cercy tell her maid, Eloise, that she had been followed by this strange presence for a period of about fifteen years.

We see that the parties occupying the house next to that in which Helene lived, must have published a fictitious name in that of Caolo—which glared on the door-plate; for we recollect Gaeol, the muscular negro, and Zetta, the superstitious maid, called their young mistress "Zuelo Nanez." And whether Zuelo Nanez was the true name of the lovely young brunette, or whether it was assumed for cogent reasons—and, if assumed or false, whether Zuelo Nanez knew of any such fact herself, is not apparent.

But, to resume the action of our drama.

When Helene saw that the knife which she sent whizzing after the Spaniard, had missed its mark, she turned to Eloise, who lay at her feet, white and motionless, in a swoon.

Snatching up a pitcher from a convenient table, she dashed some cold water in the face of the maid.

"Rouse up!" she cried. "You have made me nervous with your screaming—else, I would have been able to cast that dagger truer. Rouse up, I say!"

"Oh, madame!" exclaimed Eloise, tremulously, as she opened her eyes and stared about her in a frightened way.

"Come—you are silly!"

"Oh! it was horrible!"

"Pah!"

"Did you see it, madame?"

"What?—the shape of green, with eyes, and voice, and head, yet no face?"

"Yes," shuddering.

"I saw it. It is gone now; get up."

Eloise slowly arose. She glanced timidly around, and asked, in a whisper:

"And is he gone?"

"He?"

"That terrible man?"

"Pah! he is not so much to be feared. He could not frighten me with his oaths and scowls. I have seen him before now."

"So have I, madame."

"You have seen him? Where?"

"If not him, it was one enough like him to be his father. I am glad he is gone; I dread him."

"Tell me where you think you have seen this villain, Eloise?"

"It was in London, madame."

"In London? Well?"

"I think it was when my mother died."

She had been secretly married, madame; and when she was dying, a man came to the house—who brought a boy—a boy who must have been about nine years old. It seems all like a picture to me, it was so very, very long ago."

"Well, well, Eloise?—the man and the boy? Go on."

"My mother called this man Carlos."

"Ah!—Carlos."

"I heard him promise her that he would take care of me, and that I should be called Eloise Cyleyr. Cyleyr was my mother's name, madame."

"Well?"

"I have often thought that, perhaps, this man, Carlos, was my father. But I hope not; for he was wicked."

"Go on, Eloise."

"I crossed the ocean with the man and the boy, and came to New Orleans. I remember that the boy called the man 'father.' And the man called the boy 'Cortez.'"

"Ah!—Cortez."

"He who was here, just now, is the image of the dark man who stood at the death-bed of my mother—"

"And whose name was Carlos?"

"Yes, madame."

"Did you ever hear his other name?—'Carlos' what?"

"No, madame, I never heard."

"But, Eloise, why do you fear this man who so closely resembles the one who stood at the death bed of your mother?"

Helene Cercy eyed her keenly, and asked the question with a singular manifestation of interest.

"Because, madame, he, Carlos, treated me cruelly. On the voyage, he used to box my ears and call me 'brat,' and he often set the boy, Cortez, to teasing me unmercifully. When we landed, he managed to place me in the Orphan Girls' Asylum, where—I remember he hissed it in my ear—he hoped I would die. But, I escaped, when I was fourteen years old."

"This is very strange," thought Helene, catching a perplexing hint from the accidental revelation; "can it be that the man who stood at her mother's death-bed—and whose name was Carlos—was her father?—and she has no idea of it? Could it have been Carlos Mendoze? And was the boy—whom he called Cortez—his son?—perhaps by a former wife? Was Carlos Mendoze married twice? And have I met, in Eloise, his child by his second wife, who is then the half-sister of this Cortez Mendoze, the man whom I despise and hate? It is strange. I must find out more—some other time. I may be able to use my information to advantage. I know more of your past life already, Eloise Cyleyr, than you imagine, if it be true that you were brought over by the Quack, and placed in the Orphan Girls' Asylum. I will use that knowledge, too, if it is necessary to retain you in my service."

Then aloud:

"Well, Eloise, we'll drop this for the present. I have some questions to ask you at a future time. And let us think no more of this Green Shadow. But the Spaniard!—with a sudden recollection, "let us look through the house and see where he is. He is a thief and an assassin!"

"Why, madame said he had gone!"

"From this room, but not from the house. Come, we must hunt him out, and drive him away."

"Ah, madame! I fear him."

"But, I do not fear him, as you shall see. I have seen too much in my life to be troubled with fears. I will get rid of this rogue. That reminds me: we were about to explore the hole in the cellar wall when he came in."

"Won't madame leave it till daylight? I have been so terrified to-night, that I am weak as a child. And were we to make trouble for ourselves, I am helpless, for nearly all my strength is gone."

"Well, then, we will postpone it until to-morrow. But, I am determined to ascertain the identity of this frightful being; and I believe we have discovered its mode of ingress and exit—after nearly fifteen years of torture to me. That is why I never had receptions at my house, Eloise; fear that this green, faceless thing will appear and startle

my company, and make Madame Gossip rumor it that I have some dreadful life secret. That hole in the wall, Eloise, leads to the adjoining house!" the last thoughtfully.

"Certainly, madame."

"And the house"—in the same reflective tone, "is occupied by those mysterious people, who, for nearly fifteen years, have been the wonder and talk of the neighborhood. Eloise!" suddenly.

"Yes, madame."

"I begin to see."

"To see, madame?"

"These people who are named 'Caolo,' are haunting me!"

"Haunting you!" repeated the maid, in surprise.

"Yes, they are haunting me. Why I cannot imagine. I told you once to night, and I tell you again, I have done nothing to deserve this—this course, as it were. Never mind. When daylight comes, I shall make an effort to unravel the mystery. I am resolved upon it. Where is your lamp?"

"In the opposite parlor, madame; I—"

"Get it. We will hunt for Cortez Mendoze, the Spaniard, and drive him out of the house."

When the lamp was lighted, they went over the house, from cellar to attic.

But Cortez Mendoze was not to be found.

Every room, every closet was searched without discovering him.

He had disappeared.

"It is singular!" exclaimed Helene, when, at last they stood in the beauty's boudoir. "Where can he have hidden himself?"

"He is somewhere near, madame, be assured of it. It is dangerous for us to lie down."

"Pah! I am going to get some sleep. If you choose to be silly you may remain awake. And here—take this dagger. If you see him, use it on him. And, Eloise, use it, also, if you get a chance, on that shape of green, with voice and eyes, and without a face. If you see the thing, strike at it; and strike deep—deep, Eloise; do you understand? For it is human enough, be sure of that!"

She gave her maid the sharp dagger, which she had withdrawn from the jamb of the parlor door, when they began their search for Cortez Mendoze.

Then Helene Cercy partially disrobed, and threw herself on her soft couch, where she soon fell asleep. The same characteristic fearlessness lived in the beautiful woman, that had marked her earlier years with strangeness and crime.

Had she been alone, it is probable she would have done the same thing—gone to sleep in the moment of imminent danger, without a watch to warn her; and slumbered as she did then, as peacefully as one whose career had never contained a spot, a blemish, or a deed to rob her of her mind's rest.

Hers was a nature iron-like as it was terrible.

Eloise did not close her eyes. She sat near to her slumbering mistress, half-trembling, half-expecting to be confronted by the Green Shadow, which she feared, or by Cortez Mendoze, whom, to all appearances, she equally dreaded.

But the night wore on without anything further to mar the quietude of the house.

And the storm outside seemed gradually lulling as dawn approached.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SALOON APPARITION.

WHEN Cortez Mendoze dashed out of the parlor, in pursuit of the green apparition, his full intention was to catch it, to unmask its identity—perhaps more than this, for there was a murderous fire gleaming in his dark eyes.

Before we follow him, however, in that headlong bound, we must explain, in a few words, something essential.

After his escape from the jail in New Orleans, he started immediately, as we have shown, after Helene Cercy, on whom he had sworn to revenge himself.

But the beauty had eluded him. For a number of years he—with Frank—had hunted in vain through all the principal cities North, East, and West.

She skillfully covered her trail, made a permanent halt in Philadelphia, shortly subsequent to her flight from the Crescent

City; and though Cortez had not neglected Philadelphia in his search, he failed to discover her.

Nearly fifteen years had elapsed since the date when he began the pursuit; his heat and anger had settled to a sort of dogged fierceness.

And we find him again in New Orleans.

It was risky, he knew, to return to a place where the authorities were still on the lookout for him; but he was well-disguised, and, moreover, he had allowed himself to imagine that Helene Cercy might have "doubled" on him, and was then in that city.

The Spaniard, during the whole of this time, had been trailed by something which he could not see, yet which was a gnawing incubus to his mind—sickening his spirits with restlessness.

It was that, at regular intervals—no matter where he was—he received letters in a strange chirography, from an invisible source, always in green ink, and invariably containing the precise words which, not quite fifteen years before, in the office at the rear of his father's shop, had caused him amazement, consternation, fears for his bodily safety.

On the third night after his bold entrance into a city where the emissaries of the law were ready to pounce upon him, he sat at a table in a low wine-shop, in company with Farak, carelessly watching through his disguise the loungers of the den—half occupied with gloomy thoughts of the Green Shadow, which the periodical letters said was following him—and sipping slowly from his wine-glass.

He was desperately eager to see this Green Shadow, to catch the author of those letters in green ink; and he vowed instant death to him, her, or it—whichever it might be, if either, or if all—the moment he could gripe it.

"I am mad and sick!" he would grumble. "I am nervous, I am losing flesh, I am tired through this devilish thing, whatever, or whoever it is, if anything or anybody—ghost or human. I am not a murderer. I never harmed Carline Mandoro; I did not kill Wart Gomez. I have the paper here to prove that—the dying confession of Sanzo Romero, whom I met in Lynchburg. Yet this invisible Satan is haunting my life out—for murder!—and malediction!—I am innocent!"

His unpleasant reveries were interrupted by a voice, rough and boisterous; and, looking toward the bar, he saw a shabbily-dressed boatman, engaged with two of his own ilk, drinking and talking.

The voice seemed familiar to Cortez; the face, with its unkempt beard, was not a new one. Yet he could not imagine where he had seen the party before.

"Oh, yes," said this shabby fellow, grinning, "I knew all about Cortez Mendoze. As great a rascal as ever a rope was meant for! It was not my fault that he did not swing high for his crimes."

"They tell me he has never been heard of since he escaped," spoke one of the shabby man's companions.

"True, too. He was shrewd as a rat. I felt uneasy when I first heard he was loose—for he was vengeful and fierce as a lion! I have seen him fight, years ago, a snake and a tiger at the same time! But he is dead by this time, no doubt."

"Yes, no doubt!" exclaimed Cortez, under his breath, as he watched and listened.

"You say you testified against him, Jacques?"

"Yes; Nio and I did our best to get him hung. We had enough knowledge of his abduction and murder of Carline Mandoro to swing him easily."

"Malediction!" Cortez growled to himself. "I know him now. He is one of the devils who would have knifed me in the tapestried room—the tool of Helene Cercy, the tigress! He swore to lies, in his evidence, nearly fifteen years ago. Ha! you dog; I have a score to settle with you!"

"And you think he is dead, Jacques?" asked one of the men.

"Dead!—yes; scoundrels never live long."

"Caramba!" blurted the Spaniard, aloud, and half-starting up.

But Farak caught his master by the arm and held him still.

The boatman had started and whooped if at the report of a pistol.

Jacques turned pale.

"Whospoke?" inquired one, glancing over the assembled drinkers, when all seemed occupied with their own affairs.

"I see no one who looks as if he had said anything," Jacques ventured a little nervously.

"But I certainly heard a voice say 'caramba!'"

"And I."

"And I."

"If I did not think Cortez Mendoze was dead, I should say he was in this room. That was a favorite word of his—that same 'caramba!'—and he had a peculiar way of uttering it."

"I guess we were mistaken. And even if he was here—bah! we are three."

"We'd make short work with the villain—"

"Pound him to death!"

"Yes, we would cut him to pieces, and get the reward offered for him, dead or alive!" laughed Jacques. "Come, let us drink to the dead body of Cortez Mendoze."

"And wish that he was here to feel our knives!" added a companion.

"Malediction!" roared a voice from the corner near them, and a hard fist struck the table a frightful thud.

"Malediction! you dogs. I am Cortez Mendoze, the dead man!"

They wheeled again—this time to be confronted by the Spaniard's scowling visage.

Farak had essayed to hold his master back. But Cortez, besides being warmed by the conversation of the boatmen, was spurred to recklessness by an intense desire to wring the neck of the man who had given false evidence against him years before.

"I am Cortez Mendoze!" he cried, with a snarl. "I am the dead man!—he with whom you would make short work!—whom you would pound to death! *Caramba!* At me, now!"

As he bellowed the last, he hit one of the boatmen a terrible blow, that sent him spinning round like a top.

The second boatman followed, with a sprawl, and Cortez, venting a yell, threw himself upon Jacques.

The saloon was a bedlam of cries and commotion.

"It is Cortez Mendoze!" howled a dozen.

"Mendoze, the murderer!" echoed a dozen more.

"If you are Cortez Mendoze take that from me!" hissed Jacques, as he blazed a pistol in the Spaniard's face.

"Malediction! I am Cortez Mendoze! I'll kill you, you dog!" and he twisted Jacques beneath him, and hammered on his head with that hard, bony fist, till his struggling enemy shrieked loudly.

Bang! bang! went a couple of revolvers.

"Kill him! kill him!" rose from a score of throats.

Cortez tossed his arms wildly, and reeled backward through the smoke and dust.

"Take him now! take him! Cortez Mendoze, the murderer!"

But a form with a black face interposed between Cortez and his thirsty enemies.

Another pistol, held by a black hand, belched its contents into the excited crowd; an arm, with a fist like a sledge, shot outward rapidly, and toppled over the foremost of those who sprung to secure the wounded Spaniard.

"Fly, master—quick!"

Cortez staggered toward the rear door; and Farak, fighting with foot and fist, covered his master's retreat, displaying a marvelous muscle for one so advanced in years.

Reaching the exit, he darted suddenly through, taking the key with him, and shut and locked the door on the outside.

And while the crowd were howling and battering on the panels, the negro assisted his wounded master off in the darkness.

"One good thing, Farak," growled Cortez, painfully—for his wound smarted—"it may be rumored that I was killed in this brawl, and, by careful management, I may escape the curse of the Green Shadow. We will leave for the North to-night."

"Put this wound, master—you cannot travel."

"Malediction! I must travel. New Orleans is too hot to hold me before the missus—so much the

better for a plan of mine. If I stay I may be hanged yet! *Caramba!* We will go to-night, wound or no wound!"

And this was the attempt made by Cortez to escape the Green Shadow which followed him—an attempt that proved a failure, as will be seen by the familiar threatening letter of green, which he received on the stormy night, at the Girard House, in Philadelphia.

And it was also this brawl of which Helene Cercey had heard, through the newspapers, which contained accounts of the shooting, in New Orleans, of one Cortez Mendoze, a murderer, for whom the authorities had been long searching.

CHAPTER XXII.

CORTEZ PUTS HIS NOSE IN A TRAP.

HENCE, when Cortez Mendoze, in the parlor of Helene Cercey, saw, unmistakably, the Green Shadow—the thing which had dogged, trailed, haunted him for fifteen years—there kindled within him all his early heat of desire to grasp it, to destroy it, and thus be rid forever of that which had made so much of his existence miserable, by hovering, invisibly, continually near him, and disturbing his peace of mind—writing threatening letters, and making him feel guilty of a crime, which, by his own declaration, he had never committed.

As he rushed along the hall, he could see the fleeing object not far ahead of him; and drawing a revolver, he set his teeth in a fierce exclamation.

"*Caramba!* you thing of green. I have you at last! Stop, there!"

At the head of the kitchen stairs it halted abruptly for a second, and—

"Ha-a-a! ha! ha! ha!" rung through the house, in a wild, weird, grating echo.

The laugh penetrated his ears with disagreeable sharpness. He half paused—then dashed forward again, for the Shadow had vanished.

"Malediction!" he snorted, "it is some crazy fiend of a woman, after all! Why is it in the house of Helene Cercey? What has she to do with the Green Shadow? It is this thing that has been writing to me in green ink! I have it now; I shall twist its faceless head off!"

Bounding down the stairs, reckless of consequences, in the darkness, he drew a match from his pocket as he went, and ignited it on the wall.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" rung out again—now directly in front of him.

By the light of the match he leaped across the gloomy kitchen into the cellar, for the door of the latter stood wide, and the laugh issued from beyond it.

"It is not here"—glancing around him, and raising the faint light aloft. "Now, where—Ha! It has gone through there!"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" came from the hole in the wall near the floor; and he beheld the glittering eyes of the Shadow, in their faceless ground, peering at him.

With a cry, as the match flickered itself out, he made toward the hole.

But almost before he fairly reached the opposite side of the landing, he vented a quick, sharp oath.

Something settled heavily on his prostrate form, a grip fastened at his throat, turning him face upward, and something like iron bands on each side pinned his arms to the earth.

By that hold, which closed like a vise on him, Cortez knew that he was in the hands of a powerful man.

The suddenness of this attack, the disadvantage at which he was taken, had called forth the startled gasp. Perhaps a knife-thrust was to follow, and he was at the mercy of this invisible foe who held him down, as his revolver had slipped from his fingers at the moment of the onset.

"Well, Cortez Mendoze?" spoke the unseen captor.

"*Caramba!*"—blurted with a desperate strain.

"I have you at my mercy, you see."

"Malediction! I know that voice!" exclaimed Cortez to himself, as he ceased his vain struggling.

"You deserve to die—scoundrel!" hissed the invisible.

"Scoundrel yourself! Who are you? I

have heard your voice before somewhere. What do you want of me?"

"What brought you here?"

"I am after that Green Shadow of perdition! I will kill it if I once catch it! Hands off, here!—let me up, you dog!"

"And your incautiousness has led you into a trap."

"A trap! Malediction! I have been tumbling over traps all my life—"

"Do you feel this?"

Cortez could not prevent the shudder that crept over him as the cold muzzle of a pistol pressed against his temple.

"You mean to murder me, then!" he snarled, savagely, and locking his teeth, for he was one of those men we rarely meet with—brave as he was boastful.

"Shoot!—assassin!"

"You are an assassin, Cortez Mendoze, and you know it."

"You lie."

"Did you not waylay, and attempt to murder Dwyr Allison?"

"Ha! I know you. You are Dwyr Allison—from the grave! It is your turn now! You have me! Strike, then! Do all you would while I am down! If I once get up I will have your life! I recognized you after stabbing you in New Orleans, by the ring my teeth wrenched from your finger. You said then, while you went down, 'God help me!' It will be 'God help you' again, if I get loose long enough to lay these hands on you! A thousand maledictions on you! Why do you not fire? Pull that trigger!"

"You talk bravely for a man whose life hangs on a thread. But you are a coward after all."

"Coward yourself! Let me up once, and I will tear you to pieces! *Caramba!*"

Cortez was savage. Though he had recognized his enemy as Dwyr Allison, the man he had apparently killed in New Orleans; and though he was now completely in the power of that man, who naturally must be mad for vengeance, still the Spaniard was not subdued; he was boldly defiant, taunted his foe while he glared helplessly upward at the vacancy of gloom.

"Fire away then, you dog! Malediction! I am Cortez Mendoze! I fear you not! A hundred dollars on it, you will not kill me at the first shot! *Caramba!* Let me get up, and I will first gouge your eyes out—then rend you limb from limb! Coward yourself, I say!"

The grip at the Spaniard's throat tightened, and checked further utterance; and the finger that pressed the trigger of the weapon, whose muzzle touched the temple of the defiant man, was twitching dangerously.

"Cortez Mendoze, I am Dwyr Allison—"

"So I thought—devils seize you!"

"I ought to take your life—"

"Take it, then!"

"You are not fit to die, with the blood of Carline Mandoro on your hands."

"Maledictions on Carline Mandoro!" spurted Cortez, venting the words in a strangling breath. "I did not harm Carline Mandoro, and I can prove it!"

"No, you cannot prove that. Perhaps, too, you will prove that you did not kill Wart Gomez?"

"I tell you I can—"

"You lie, Cortez Mendoze!"

"*Caramba!*" squirming and writhing desperately.

"You did kill Wart Gomez; you did stab Carline Mandoro."

"No—I did not! Wart Gomez died by the hand of Sanzo Romero; and it was he who stabbed Carline Mandoro. I am an innocent man!"

"Who is Sanzo Romero?"

"That is no business of yours!"

"This is a trick by which you hope to save your life."

"*Caramba!* Deuce take my life! I am an innocent man. Shoot off that pistol, and you will be a murderer! I will point you out to Satan when you come to the next world! Ho! ho! ho!" and he laughed—a half-choked, wild and savage laugh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

It was the day after the night marked by our recent chapters of narrative and explanation.

The hour was five p. m.

Helene Cercy, in her boudoir, was sitting at a writing-table, idly twirling a penholder between her fingers and gazing absently down at the rich carpeting—not absently, either, for the lustrous eyes anon shot forth from their brilliant depths a glance that was full of strangely-guided thought.

She had slept well the night gone, when Eloise had watched by her couch; she looked as fresh and beautiful as ever—only, there was a peculiar seriousness in the expression of her face, one indicative of unusual reflection and inward musing.

"The girl," she uttered at last, in a low, meditative way, "may be just the one, the thing, the convenience I want, to rid myself of that villainous Cortez Mendoze. That she is his half-sister, I am convinced by what I learned from Jacques and Nio of their girl accomplice, Rosella—and Eloise must be this Rosella, by her own story of crossing the ocean with Carlos Mendoze—it must have been no other than Mendoze—and her subsequent escape from the Orphan Girls' Asylum, where the Quack placed her. I may, in some way, use her relationship to my interests. Or, if not that, then I must use her in some way, and force her to obey me by my knowledge of her past life. It is strange how familiar her face is to me whenever I look at her closely. I am sure I never saw her until she entered my service, six months ago; and yet there is something—a glance that sometimes darts from her gray eyes—which reminds me of the dead Florose—'sdeath! I must not think of my dead rival again! And I am foolish; I am sure that I know pretty much the history of this Eloise Cyleyr. The plot, now! How shall I manage it?"

She drummed on the table with the penholder, and stared harder at the carpet, as she taxed her fertile brain for a feasible means by which to use Eloise in ridding herself of Cortez Mendoze; for that Cortez Mendoze was half-brother to the maid, she felt assured by answers to questions she had shrewdly put to the latter during the forenoon, and which corroborated suspicions of hers, sprung of certain information which she had incidentally gained of Nio, one of the ruffians we have seen in her employ in New Orleans.

And she must have partially arrived at a determination, for the knitting of the delicate brows gradually relaxed, and the expression of her features assumed an easier outline.

While she was thus occupied, Eloise came into the room.

"Well, have you done as I instructed you?" the beauty asked, while Eloise lighted the lamp her mistress was accustomed to burn, instead of gas, in that room.

"Yes, madame," replied the maid.

"And there is another thing, Eloise—what about my servants?"

"They are all gone. They left within two hours after madame discharged them; and one said—"

"Ah! 'one said!' What did one say?"

"One said—it was Leo, the cook—that she had heard strange noises last night."

"Ha! And did she see anything, Eloise, think you?"

"I cannot answer as to that, madame."

"This Leo, the cook, may or may not have seen anything, for all you know?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, and was there any other remark by these apish, gossiping servants?"

"None that I heard, madame. But every one of them seemed glad to depart."

"And I am glad they have gone!" exclaimed Helene, worriedly. "But I hope they, or any of them, have not seen this Green Shadow."

Then, after a long pause:

"Eloise—I was questioning you this morning."

"Yes," returned the maid, adding, closely: "Does madame want me for anything else at present? I would like—"

"I wish to speak again on the subject of our conversation this morning," interrupted the beauty.

"Madame is interested in me. I am grateful."

"I have not forgotten a single item of what you told me. And I have much to add."

"Madame forgets; she said she would explore the hole in the cellar wall to-day. Shall we not do it now?"

Evidently she disliked to have her mistress revive the subject of the morning's conversation, else she would not have made the suggestion she did; for we know that—to all appearance—Eloise was strongly adverse to exploring the hole in the cellar and courting the danger which might be lurking beyond it.

"Never mind that, just now; there are other matters more pressing to which I must attend. Listen to me, now."

"Yes, madame," uneasily.

"I am going away from Philadelphia."

"Going away?"

"Yes. Instead of trying to find out who or what this Shadow is, that has haunted me for fifteen years, I have fixed upon another plan; I will try to escape it."

"Yes, madame," said Eloise, unmeaningly.

"At the same time and in the same means, I will make an effort to escape this villainous Spaniard, who is my deadly enemy, and who, also, it seems, has been tracking me for fifteen years. You remember, Eloise, when you and I were riding in Fairmount Park, some months ago, I called your attention to a man who stared at us from a passing carriage, and who was out of sight before I could recognize him? It was Cortez Mendoze, the man who came here last night. He must have followed me from the Park, and ascertained in that way where I lived. He is my enemy; he has been hunting me for fifteen years; he has found me. I must get rid of him, and you are to aid me."

"I, madame?"

"You."

"How is it possible?"

"I will tell you. Mark well all I shall say. You mailed a note for me awhile ago, addressed to Cortez Mendoze, through the general delivery of the post-office."

"Yes."

"He may get that note, or he may not. I think it more than likely he will. It contains an invitation to call on me, any evening within twelve days from date. When he comes, as I know he will, he must sit in that chair—that one—there, with the high back against the wall. Seat yourself in it, Eloise."

Eloise obeyed, half-hesitating.

When she was seated, Helene went up to her, and touched a tiny knob—which was a spring—at the top of the high back.

Instantly, the arms of the chair crossed each other, and pressed tightly down on the limbs of the one who sat there. From the back there shot around a thin band of iron, which glided over her bosom, imprisoning her arms at the same time; and, from underneath the chair, two circlets of iron clasped, with a double click, around her ankles.

It was an ingenious contrivance, a combination of machinery and springs that worked with terrible efficiency.

Taken so suddenly by surprise, and perceiving how utterly helpless she was, Eloise felt alarmed.

"Madame!" she screamed, in affright.

"Fear nothing," said Helene. "I only meant to show you how easily Cortez Mendoze could be got rid of. There—you are free again."

By turning a small crank that was concealed behind the chair, Helene readjusted the mischievous apparatus, saying, while doing it:

"That chair was made for me, many years ago, by two old slaves of mine, named Jacques and Nio."

"Jacques and Nio!" came like a startled echo from the maid's lips; and she trembled visibly.

"I am not mistaken," thought Helene, who had purposely uttered the two names with a peculiar emphasis, and then watched keenly to note the effect upon Eloise. "I am not mistaken. Eloise Cyleyr and Rosella, the 'thieves' pride,' are identical. See how quickly she recognized those names!—the names of the men I employed, fifteen years ago, in New Orleans."

Then aloud:

"Why did you start, Eloise? Did you—"

"I thought I saw a face among the plants on the balcony, madame," replied Eloise, interrupting, and nervously pointing toward

the window which opened on a small balcony where there were a number of plants and flowers.

"But, why did you repeat those names?—Jacques and Nio?"

"Indeed, I scarce know. I heard you utter them, madame; and at the same moment I was so frightened, the exclamation must have burst involuntarily from my lips."

"She lies admirably!" was Helene's mental comment on this prompt excuse; and aloud, she said:

"Now, Eloise, when Cortez Mendoze comes, he must sit in that chair—you saw how I used it? But, I will not be here. I am going away this very night."

Eloise listened.

"I will leave you in charge of the house. Every night, without fail, you must be dressed in the same clothes I wore last night when Cortez Mendoze was here."

"Yes, madame."

"You must also wear a mask—a wire mask."

"A mask, madame?"

"Yes. I have noticed that, in figure and voice, you are very like me—your hair, too, is long and black, like mine. Do you not see?—you are to assume the character of Helene Cercy. Behind the mask, which you will insist on retaining, you will not be known otherwise. You will receive Cortez Mendoze. When he comes, you will invite him up here. You will tell him that you have concluded to yield to his demand to become his wife—"

"His wife!"

"Pah! you will tell him that to deceive him. Tell him that you wish to converse upon matters relative to the marriage. Persuade him up here. Seat him in that chair. Then make him captive, as I did you a moment ago."

"And then—?" asked Eloise, pausing.

"Then you will set fire to the house."

"Set fire to the house!"

"Yes."

"But, madame—"

"Have the lamp ready, like it burns now, on the table. Upset it on the bed and floor. Throw a blanket round his head, so that his cries may not be heard. Lock the door securely—and flee for your life. I will meet you in St. Louis. I want to retain you in my service."

As this revolting plot for the destruction of Cortez Mendoze burst from the lips of the beautiful woman, a deep color suffused her cheeks, she spoke excitedly, her eyes flashed and glittered. While she unfolded the plan with such vividness, she could fancy she saw her hated enemy imprisoned fast by the contrivance of the chair, writhing in the smoke and heat closing around him. A picture of his miseries arose in her imagination; she could almost hear his fierce oaths and desperate, agonizing cries.

And she had determined that Eloise should carry out this diabolical scheme.

"Madame!" exclaimed the amazed Eloise, in an accent of horror.

"Do you understand me?" interrogated the beauty.

"Madame! But—"

"Well?—'but.' But what?"

"I cannot—I cannot perpetrate so fiendish a deed."

"Oh, you cannot? But you shall! Do you hear me, Eloise?—I say you shall!"

"She is certainly crazed!" resolved Eloise, inwardly, and shuddering imperceptibly at the strange sound of her mistress's voice.

"I say you shall aid me. Let me show you how I can compel you—"

"Compel me, madame?" with a singular firmness.

"Ah!" passed through Helene's brain, "there is that same look in the gray eyes!—the very glance I have seen Florose Earncliffe dart—pah! what foolishness!"

And to Eloise:

"Ay, compel you. Hark now, Eloise Cyleyr: I know you well."

"Can it be that she has discovered me?" exclaimed Eloise, within herself, in a slight trepidation.

She stepped back before the frown on her face that approached her. For Helene understood that trepidation was a tremor.

"You are a culprit this moment!"

"Madame!"

"You were once under arrest for being concerned in the robbery of the house of Elsor Earncliffe, in the city of New Orleans. Ha!—you are turning white."

Eloise had paled at mention of the name of Elsor Earncliffe.

"You escaped the summary punishment you merited through lack of sufficient evidence. You were known then as 'Rosella'—you were associated with a number of thieves, who called you their 'pride.' After you were released by the authorities, it was supposed that you committed suicide, for a body, with features resembling yours, was found floating, dead, near the foot of Canal street. You were then fair, with light hair—am I not right? You have since browned your face with some very delicate dye, and made your hair black by the same means. Of course you were never heard of after the finding of the body. But you were far from being dead—the body of the dead girl was not that of 'Rosella.' I had in my employ two ruffians, named Jacques and Nio. They told me all about you, Rosella; said you were brought over from England by Carlos Mendoze, the Quack, and placed in the Orphan Girls' Asylum; that you ran away from this place, and joined a gang of thieves, under the name of Rosella. Jacques and Nio were your accomplices in robbing the house of Elsor Earncliffe." (Eloise grew pale again at mention of Elsor Earncliffe) "on which occasion one of the servants was killed in giving the alarm. They know you well. They can identify you in connection with the burglary and the killing of the servant. I know that Jacques and Nio are still living, and I can easily find them. Now, what if I seek them out, and say: 'Look—here is Rosella, not dead, after all! I want to use her for a purpose, and she is obstinate. I will give you five thousand dollars apiece if you will turn state's evidence against her!' What then, eh? They will do as I desire—I know it, because—I may tell you—I have bribed them, for a much smaller sum, to kill people for me! You will be sent to prison! And thus I will serve you, Eloise Cyleyr, if you refuse to perform the task I am about to give you! Cortez Mendoze must be destroyed. You must destroy him!"

"Madame!"

"Not a word!—unless to agree to what I propose."

"Oh, madame! you have ruined me!" cried Eloise.

"Not yet; but I will, if you refuse to obey me."

"No, no; you have done it already!"

"I say I have not—but promise you that I will!"

"But, madame, you have done it now! Oh Heaven!"

Eloise had bowed her face to her hands, and seemed greatly excited and terrified.

"What do you mean by saying that I have already ruined you?"

"Madame!—there has been a listener to all you have said!"

"A listener?—no! Impossible!" and Helene glanced quickly around, half-expecting to discover some one one standing near them.

The room was growing dark. The sun had sunk; and queer shadows were forming about the two, aided by the low, weird flame of the lamp, as they stood there, *en tableau*.

"You are mistaken, Eloise."

"No, madame, I am not. I saw a face at that window, there—on the balcony."

"Ha!"

Helene wheeled about, with the intention of hastening to the small balcony, to see if her maid was right.

But she paused short.

A startling sound fell upon her ears.

They could hear a heavy, rapid footstep ascending the stairs—soon it was in the hallway.

In a moment the door was burst open, with a quivering bang, and Cortez Mendoze bounded into the room.

He was bareheaded, he stared wildly. In each hand he carried a cocked pistol; his hair was on end in dishevelment; his face was

haggard, ferocious; and, as he broke suddenly and unexpectedly upon them, he half-yelped:

"Malediction! The devil!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SHADOW UNMASKS.

WE return to Cortez Mendoze, who panted and writhed beneath his unseen captor, in the cellar of the house adjoining the residence of Helene Cercy.

"Spaniard," said this invisible foe, "you tempt me to kill you?"

"Kill away, then!"

"No, I have another punishment in store for you. Look!"

As the unseen spoke, the cellar was lighted up brilliantly.

Zetta came upon the scene, carrying a large lamp, whose broad, flaring flame discovered the tableau in progress.

Behind Zetta was another female—a figure garbed from head to foot in green, and whose glittering eyes flashed from their faceless surface on the bewildered Spaniard.

Cortez Mendoze stared in astonishment. The man who held him pinioned down to the earth was a negro; and this negro was Gaeol, whom we have seen before in the earlier part of our story.

Perplexed and amazed, Cortez stared first at the ebon countenance that lowered above him—then turned his head, and gnashed his teeth, as he looked upon the thing which was, beyond doubt, the Green Shadow, whose objective, yet invisible presence had been an incubus to his mind for fifteen years.

"Malediction!" he exclaimed, his eyes widening in their riveted gaze.

"You see, Cortez Mendoze, you are in a trap."

"Oh, yes!—I see!" he howled, gratingly. "You are all my enemies! You have me trapped securely! Next thing, I shall be torn in shreds by—Ha! *Caramba!* Keep off, you shape of the devil!" the last as the enigmatical Shadow advanced quickly, and knelt beside him, fixing those strange, dark eyes full on his face.

There was something about the figure, about the suddenness of its actions, that made him shudder and recoil, despite his strong nerves and defiant nature.

"Cortez Mendoze," said the Shadow, in a rustling, whispering, menacing voice, "we have caught you at last! We shall mete out that retribution you deserve—not for the murder of Carline Mandoro, but for the murder of Wart Gomez!"

"Malediction! Then I shall suffer for a crime which I never committed."

"You are a villain and liar!"

Cortez only scowled, clinching his jaws fiercely as he met the penetrating look of the faceless thing.

"Hush!" said Zetta, raising one hand, warningly. "I hear footsteps. Some one is approaching the cellar of the next house. This light will be seen through the hole."

"Cortez Mendoze," Gaeol hissed, tightening his hold on the throat of the captive, and pressing the cold muzzle of the weapon closer, "will you die or will you live? We want you to get up and come with us. You must make no noise. If you are not ready to obey, I swear, by the Heaven above us, I will fire this pistol and kill you on the spot! Be quick!—your choice?"

"*Caramba!* I will go," answered Cortez, changing his manner, abruptly, to one of submission.

For, with the quickness of a lightning flash, he reasoned as follows:

"This negro—whom I took to be Dwyer Allison—is a Satan! I see murder in his eye! He will certainly keep his word if I hesitate! He will pull that trigger, and my brains will be spilled! Malediction! I must not die yet—I must live—for vengeance, and to grind Helene Cercy, the tigress under my heel! I must not die till I have had my revenge!—revenge on Helene Cercy, and on these vultures—all—*caramba!* If I am cautious, I may yet escape this giant of a negro, this 'curst Shadow, this woman, whom I recognize as the servant of Carline Mandoro fifteen years ago! I will be wary. I will go with them. Mayhap I may get loose shortly; and if I do—ho! let them look out."

"Will you swear to go quietly?" asked Gaeol, speaking rapidly. "For remember, I am in earnest; you shall die the moment you falter, hesitate or resist!"

"I will go," replied Cortez, dolefully.

"Come, then. Do not forget; your life hangs on a thread. If you so much as look

to the right, or to the left, or other than directly in front, you die in your tracks."

"I tell you I will go—and I swear to submit quietly."

The Spaniard was permitted to regain his feet.

Gaeol grasped him by the collar, with a hold of iron, and thrust the pistol-barrel into his ear.

"The deuce!" thought Cortez. "If he trips or stumbles, or has a nervous contraction of the finger, I am a dead man. Curse this fix!"

Zetta led the way from the cellar. The Shadow followed stealthily in their rear.

Cortez behaved docilely enough—walked straight and steady; but, all the while, his eyes were snapping, his teeth were grinding, a fire of murderous hate and anger was seething in his passionate breast, as he inwardly cursed the trio who so cleverly had gotten him into their power; and he vowed, a score of times, to annihilate these tormenting captors, should opportunity ever offer.

They proceeded to the large room on the second floor, where we first introduced the beautiful girl, Zuelo, to the reader.

Here they paused.

Zetta—holding the great lamp so that its rays fell across the frowning, scowling, contorted face of their prisoner—looked upon him in triumph.

The Shadow was near; the flashing, scintillating eyes fastened like orbs of a deadly charm on the Spaniard.

"Now, Cortez Mendoze," said Gaeol, in that deep voice which made his utterance so impressive, "you say you did not kill Carline Mandoro—"

"*Caramba!* no!" interrupted Cortez, who stood with his back toward the speaker—the iron grip still at his collar, the pistol still inserted in his ear.

A man of less nerve than Cortez Mendoze must have quailed in terror under so startling a predicament; for, had there occurred the least thing to disturb the trigger of the pistol, the days of the man it menaced would end with the fatal discharge.

"And we grant that you are right," continued the negro. "We know that you did not kill Carline Mandoro—"

"Ha! you know it?"

"You stabbed her—but you did not murder her as you thought and intended. She lived. But you did kill Wart Gomez, and for that we shall deal with you as your crime deserves. We are the avengers of Wart Gomez!"

"You remember me?" inquired Zetta.

"You were the servant of Carline Mandoro—yes. You think I murdered Wart Gomez; you think I stabbed Carline Mandoro; you seek vengeance on me because I wronged, or tried to wrong, or killed, or tried to kill, your master and mistress. But you are mistaken. I am an innocent man! *Caramba!*"

"What proof have you of it?" demanded Gaeol.

"The dying confessor of Sanzo Romero!"

"Who was Sanzo Romero?"

"He was one of a gang of thieves who were governed by that girl-queen, called by them 'Rosella, the Pride.' Sanzo Romero killed Wart Gomez—not I!"

"Where is this confession?"

"It is here!"

He drew a folded manuscript from his pocket and cast it upon the floor, at the feet of Zetta.

The woman picked it up.

"Read it," he added, doggedly, "and you will see that I did not kill Wart Gomez, and, also, that it was not I who stabbed Carline Mandoro. I am an innocent, but unlucky dog! *Caramba!*"

"We will read it, but not now," Gaeol said. "Do you know that face, Cortez Mendoze? Look."

Gaeol pointed to the green figure.

At the sign, this figure tore away the peculiar, eyeleted skin which gave a shapelessness to her features, and Zuelo Nanez was revealed.

But Cortez Mendoze could not suppress a cry.

"Malediction!" he blurted. "It is Carline Mandoro herself!—or her ghost, as she looked when she was killed, fifteen years ago!"

CHAPTER XXV.

HE SHALL SEE.

WHEN Zuelo Nanez unmasked, the Spaniard's amazement was so great that he gazed on her like one stupefied, overwhelmed, incredulous, after venting the exclamation which closed our last chapter.

Zuelo was the exact counterpart of Carline, the wife of Wart Gomez, as she had looked at a date fifteen years past, on the night of the (as yet) unexplained murder in the city of New Orleans.

And this striking resemblance made Cortez feel that either this was Carline Mandoro, or her ghost, or—then a new thought flashed into his brain: perhaps it was the child of Carline, and hence the remarkable likeness.

"It is not Carline Mandoro," said Gaeol.

"No," added Zetta.

"Then who is it?" he demanded, still staring, and undecided what to imagine.

"It is her child—"

"So I thought. *Caramba!*"

"It is the child of the woman you stabbed on that night when you murdered Wart Gomez—when you stole the Star of Diamonds."

"Satan seize the Star of Diamonds! I believe it is the cause of all my trouble in the past, the cause of my being in this trap! Malediction! I think I see through all. This is the child of Carline Mandoro, who believes that I killed her father, that I stabbed her mother, and who will not be convinced otherwise—though I have the confession of Sanzo Romero to prove that I am an innocent man."

"Zuelo, the child of Wart Gomez, seeks vengeance on the murderer of her father," Zetta said, frowning.

"And now that I am in your power, you would have it, no doubt!" snapped Cortez, desperately.

"Our vow was to take the law for your punishment into our own hands," Gaeol continued. "But if—"

"Yes—if! *Caramba!*"

"If, as you hint, there is a possibility of your innocence, we will not subject you to the torture we had in store. For fifteen years we have been on your track, hunting you with letters that spoke of a Green Shadow—"

"Yes—death catch it! I see what it is now!" Cortez interrupted, grating his teeth.

"I am no negro, but I am Dwyr Allison, he whom you tried to assassinate years ago in New Orleans. You failed in that, Cortez Mendoze; and I assumed this disguise, that I might still follow you without being suspected. I met Carline Gomez—"

"Ho! you met Carline Gomez!"

"She had recovered from your knife-blow—"

"It was not my knife!"

"Silence while I am speaking—"

"*Caramba!*"

"She had adopted the name of 'Nanez,' to cover her true identity, and her child has since been called Zuelo Nanez."

Zuelo was leaning slightly forward, her ears strained to keenest listening. She had heard Gaeol declare that he was not a negro; that he was a white man, and his name was Dwyr Allison. She had learned that Carline Mandoro—whose wrongs she had sworn, at the death bed of her mother, to avenge—was her own mother: a fact that had been concealed from her till this moment. What more was there?

"Zerline Nanez—as she then called herself," Gaeol went on, "was eager for revenge. She met me, and pointed out to me the poisoner of Florose Earncliffe, the woman I dearly loved. We entered into an agreement that I should haunt you, the murderer of her husband, for years, with threatening letters, and she would haunt Helene Cercey, the murderer of my betrothed in the shape of a Green Shadow—thus bringing it man to man, and woman to woman. And our intention was, after making the lives of you and Helene Cercey miserable, to drag you both to the halls of justice, and confront you with charges that would certainly call down retribution on your heads. Zerline Nanez performed her part faithfully until a few years ago, when she made her child, Zuelo, swear, at her death-bed, to continue the programme which so embittered the existence of Helene Cercey with a gnawing ter-

ror. I have performed my part as well—through my valet, a man whom you may have seen. He is small and thin, with gray eyes—"

"Malediction!" Cortez exclaimed. "He is the small man who wears a cap! I saw him to-night! I would have chased him till I caught him, and then choked his life out, had I known it! *Caramba!*"

"You are now at our mercy, Cortez Mendoze. We pause before wreaking that punishment which we still believe you richly merit. We pause to read this dying confession of Sanzo Romero—"

"It will prove my innocence!" asserted Cortez, vehemently.

"And if there is the slightest shade of aught that is truthful in its appearance, we will simply turn you over to the law, and give you ample opportunity to prove that innocence."

"Then I shall escape without a scratch!" declared the Spaniard, confidently.

"We shall see. Zetta, bring the light."

While Zetta held the lamp, Gaeol marched the prisoner across the room, with the barrel of the pistol still held to the latter's ear, and ready to deal death in case of resistance.

"*Caramba!* What are you going to do with me now?"

"Keep you safe for the present, without answering for your future."

And Cortez Mendoze was forcibly thrust into a spacious closet, which admirably suited the purpose of a prison cell.

There was no opening save the narrow aperture for ventilation over the door, through which streamed the light from the room beyond.

He brought up, with a jerk and a thump, against the wall of the cramped place; and one hand sought the other pistol which he have seen in his possession, and which his captors had failed to suspect him of having.

The black scowl of discomfiture gradually faded from his brow, however, and he placed his ear to the keyhole to listen.

"Gaeol," said Zuelo, when the pseudo-negro had fastened the door of the closet and turned toward her, "you are a white man?"

"Yes," and the deep, guttural tone was gone.

He reassumed his natural voice, which was smooth, rich and engaging.

"Why have I not known this before? Why was I not told that my true name was Gomez, and that Carline Mandoro, whose wrongs I swore to avenge, was my own mother?"

"There were reasons, mistress," Zetta answered.

"That is what so perplexed me to-night, when I saw the name on the Star of Diamonds. My mother told me that I was to avenge Carline Mandoro, with Gaeol; that Cortez Mendoze had killed her husband. But when I was so surprised at seeing the name on the star, both you and Zetta denied me an explanation. You should have told me all. You should have told me that it was my mother's wrongs for which I sought an opportunity to entrap and punish Cortez Mendoze. And you might have let me know that I was serving you, Gaeol, in haunting the woman who poisoned the woman you loved. I know all, though, now. And I am glad of it, for my life has been a mystery to me. What are we to do with this Cortez Mendoze?"

"Wait. I will be with you presently, and we will read this confession of Sanzo Romero. After that we can decide on a course," and with the words he left the room.

"Let them read it!" thought Cortez, who overheard all. "They will find that I am an innocent man. *Caramba!*"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CONFESSION OF SANZO ROMERO; AND WHAT ZUELO FOUND.

GAEOL was not long absent. When he returned, it was not in the character of a negro, which, for so many years had been his disguise; but, with the deceptive stain washed entirely off, he stood before them as Dwyr Allison, handsome and commanding.

"Did you know of this, Zetta?" Zuelo asked, turning to the serving-woman.

"Yes, mistress."

"You should have told me, then. I have spoken harshly at times to Gaeol—but I never once dreamed that Gaeol was not an African, as he appeared to be!"

"It is no matter," Dwyr said, smiling. "We had reasons for not acquainting you with my true identity. You know nearly all now. Listen, and I will tell you more."

He then proceeded to recount to her, more in detail, what we have revealed in our previous chapter; how it was that Carline Gomez, after being dropped from the arms of her abductor, on the night of the murder, in the city of New Orleans, had recovered her senses, and dragged herself into the shadows of an alley.

When she found sufficient strength to act, she bandaged the severe cut on her neck as best she could, and tottered away in the darkness.

She determined not to return to her home. She felt sure that the man who had killed her husband, and who had very high stricken out her own life, was no other than Cortez Mendoze. She would retire to some hiding-place until her wound should heal, and then seek to destroy the wretch who had deprived her of happiness forever.

With a sum of money, which, fortunately, she had in her purse, she engaged a room in a secluded section.

Her neck was not in so bad a condition as to render medical assistance necessary; and thus she lived, for a while, dead to the world—nursing herself, and planning for vengeance on Cortez Mendoze.

It was a fate which brought her to that especial locality. She had not occupied the apartment two days when she discovered that the room adjoining was rented by Pedro Gomez, the father of her dead husband, and head gardener of Elsom Earncliffe.

He had kept her awake by having nightmares; for the partition between was very thin, and she could distinctly hear the Spaniard muttering, mumbling, groaning, as he tossed restlessly on his couch.

She was seized with a desire to know what preyed upon the mind of the gardener, that he should so frequently talk to himself, that his nights should be sleepless and miserable, with this habit of rolling about and uttering strangely.

On one occasion he was more given to these growlings than usual. She could hear him exclaim, grunt, and, anon, hit the little table at his bedside with a force to emphasize his words.

She arose cautiously, applied her ear to a crack, and heard Pedro chuckling in a manner something after this wise:

"Oh-o! By Satan! it is done! To-day was the last day—my last chance! How easily I put the poison into the rose! How cleverly I gave the deadly thing to her! And she smelled of it, and it was soon done with. Ha! ha! ha! Have I not served my new mistress well? I will soon get that pile of money, and be rich!—rich! Ho! ho! ho! ho! It is true: I have made more in one day, by doing this, than I could make with my spade in five years! The rival of Helene Cercey is no more! Pedro Gomez is the lucky dog who put Florose out of the way! What good fortune! What a stride upward!—from handling trowel and spade, and digging dirt! What an improvement, from the poor gardener to a gentleman, and eventually the husband of that devil-of-an-angel, Helene Cercey! Ho-o! I applaud—I congratulate Pedro Gomez! And all because I poisoned Florose Earncliffe. Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

A terrible realization burst upon Carline.

She had heard of the sudden and mysterious death of Florose. As she listened, the whole discovery flashed upon her. Pedro Gomez had poisoned the beautiful blonde; and, more, he had done it at the instigation of Helene Cercey.

It lent a suggestion to the brain which she tasked so hard for a plan to destroy Cortez Mendoze.

She sought Dwyr Allison, who, she knew, was the affianced of Florose, and who would naturally be eager to avenge his betrothed when he should learn of the fact which had been committed.

As we have seen

night when he called at the house of Helene Cercy, in answer to the note he had received from her.

Carline conducted him to her house.

We will not pause to describe Zetta's joy at seeing her mistress alive.

From that night the plot to haunt Helene Cercy and Cortez Mendoza commenced.

Helene's sudden departure from New Orleans, about the time that Cortez escaped from jail, was caused by an apparition of the Green Shadow, which caused her much terror then, and haunted her continually afterward.

Through some means Carline gained an entrance into the house. At precisely the hour of midnight, Helene started from a sound sleep, to see, standing at the foot of her bed—like a ghost in the dim light she always burned—a shape of green, without a face, yet with piercing eyes that fastened rivetingly upon her.

She shrieked and fainted—withal her nature of iron, she swooned; for the spectral visitant was so sudden, so significant, so fearful, that, despite her strong nerves, she was, for the first time in her life, overcome with actual fright.

The girl, Ola, roused by the cry, came running in.

But the Green Shadow had disappeared. Helene had recovered; and the maid was dismissed without explanation.

Within twenty four hours the beauty left New Orleans, filled with a dread that she was pursued by the horrible thing—an apprehension that soon proved true.

Carline was three months in overtaking the fleeing woman—finally moving into the house adjoining Helene's, on Walnut street.

When Zuelo was about fifteen years old, Carline died. We have alluded to her funeral in an early installment of our story.

At the death-bed Zuelo was made to swear solemnly that she would continue what Zerline Nanez (then so named) had begun, and, also, that she would search unceasingly for the Star of Diamonds.

But Zuelo was not made familiar with the fatal history of the star—and at the time Carline narrated it to her husband, Wart, Zuelo was too young a child to recollect anything of it.

All this Dwyr Allison explained to Zuelo, including a history of the star, as Carline had told it to him; and throughout the young girl listened raptly.

And there was another who listened. Cortez Mendoza was glaring at the trio through the ventilator over the door of the closet.

He had placed one foot at the lock that protruded inside, and, by grasping the frame, had raised himself so as to see plainly all that had transpired in the room.

"Malediction!" he muttered. "How easy for me to bore a hole through their heads with this pistol of mine!"

But he restrained himself.

"And now," said Dwyr, when he had concluded, "we have this Cortez Mendoza in our power. Next, we will secure Helene Cercy. But, first, we will examine this manuscript which the Spaniard has given us, and see what is in the dying confession of Sanzo Romero. If there is anything that may lead us to think that it was Sanzo Romero—and not Cortez Mendoza—who killed Wart Gomez, then we will turn the prisoner over to the law. But, if we fail to be satisfied of there being any truth at all in the confession, then we will take vengeance into our own hands—as we are sworn to do—and put Cortez Mendoza to a dozen deaths!"

"Caramba!" exclaimed Cortez, in his mouth, "and if you are not convinced by that document that I am an innocent man, then I shall immediately blow your brains out! Malediction on your doubts!"

The Spaniard's mustache stood out wildly, and his eyes distended staringly, as he watched them from his uncomfortable elevation.

Zetta had extinguished the large lamp; standing beneath the chandelier, she broke the red seal on the

and began to read aloud:

"LYNCHBURG, VA.

"I, Sanzo Romero, knowing I am about to stand before the Giver of Life and Omnipotent Judge, do make this, my dying confession, in justice to Cortez Mendoza, my old comrade, this night of June 15th, 18—

"It has been believed by some that Cortez Mendoza murdered Wart Gomez and Carline, his wife. But know all that I, Sanzo Romero, am the doer of the deed, so help me God!

"I hated Wart Gomez, because he was once instrumental in bringing the punishment of the law upon me, in a case of highway robbery, and I vowed that, sooner or later, I would have my revenge.

"On the night of the dark deed, I was much in liquor, and, frenzied by ardent spirits, my hate burned till I resolved to seek him then, and have his life. Had I been sober, it would not have happened. To be drunk is to be mad. Such was my condition.

"I reached his house, and was waiting outside—looking in through the window—until they should retire. While there, I heard Carline Gomez narrating the history of a certain Star of Diamonds. I learned that it was of great value, also that it was in her bureau drawer; and I resolved that it should be mine, while I satisfied my unholy thirst for vengeance.

"But they wearied me. Each minute my passion flamed fresher and fiercer, till at last I could no longer wait. I entered the house and was met by Wart Gomez. He thought he recognized me as Cortez Mendoza, with whom he had had some difficulty. I knew of the enmity existing between Gomez and Mendoza, and I made use of my knowledge. We fought, and I killed him. In the struggle I also cut Carline with my knife.

"Then I hurried up-stairs to secure the valuable Star of Diamonds. On descending I was confronted by Carline Gomez, who disputed my way. She, too, imagined me to be Cortez Mendoza, for she called me murderer, in his name. I had no time to spare. There was a loud alarm; and, first knocking her senseless, I lifted her in my arms and bore her away—why I did it, I do not know. It was an impulse—nothing more. I hoped at the time that I had not killed Carline Gomez, also, for I owed her no grudge.

"After being pursued a long way, I dropped my burden, and soon escaped my pursuers in the darkness. I made straight for the shop of Carlos Mendoza, the Quack. Only Cortez was there. I told him what I had done. I gave him the Star of Diamonds, and told its history. I then bethought me of escape. The perpetration of the bloody deed had sobered me, I saw that I had committed a terrible crime, and I must fly. And within the hour, remorse was eating at my brain.

"On that same night I left the city, with the face of my victim ever in my mind. But suspicion did not point toward me; through a combination of circumstances I was well screened.

"Cortez Mendoza comes to me now, by accident, and tells me how he has suffered through my wickedness. This confession must exonerate him. I have no fears of the law, at a moment when I shall soon be beyond the reach of man, and be held to answer by a sterner court.

"SANZO ROMERO.

"WALTER BOLE, M. D.

"EDWARD NEAL, D. D."

After reading, Dwyr refolded the manuscript and placed it in his pocket.

"You have heard?"

"And what are we to do?" Zuelo asked.

"We must wait."

"Caramba!" muttered Cortez, on his perch. "Wait? How long will they wait?"

"It reads plausibly," Dwyr continued. "You see, there are witnesses. These witnesses must be found. Can you make the journey, Zuelo?"

"A journey?"

"I would wish you to go to Lynchburg, find the witnesses—if there be such persons—and satisfy yourself of the genuineness of this document."

"Malediction!" the Spaniard growled,

sotto voce; "these hawks would keep me here, like a rat in a trap, till they can send to Lynchburg!"

"I will go," said Zuelo. "And I will go—"

"To-morrow night will be time enough," suggested Allison. "I will arrange for my valet to accompany you. He will be here to-night, when I will speak to him about it. Meantime, I will answer for the safe-keeping of the prisoner."

"Now it is my turn to reveal something."

Zuelo smiled as she looked at Allison. He returned her gaze with one of inquiry.

"What is it?"

"It is a revelation that will prove the innocence of Helene Cercy."

"WHAT!"

Allison paled and started.

Zetta uttered a low cry of surprise.

"Caramba!" mumbled Cortez, pricking his ears.

"Zuelo, what do you mean?" demanded Dwyr.

"I mean that Helene Cercy is innocent of the death of Florose Earncliffe."

"Are you crazy?"

"Zuelo!" exclaimed Zetta.

"The deuce! What's this?" wondered the listener in the closet.

"I am not crazy," Zuelo pursued. "I say that Helene Cercy is not guilty of the crime for which she has been haunted for fifteen years. And my proof is in the fact that Florose Earncliffe is not dead!"

"Zuelo Gomez!" Allison cried, striding forward, and seeming ready to devour her with the wild, eager, incredulous gaze of his starting eyes; "Zuelo Gomez, what are you saying? Be careful! Remember what Florose Earncliffe was to me! Remember, you are telling me that which, in my heart, I believe to be impossible! Do not excite me uselessly!"

"I would not speak an untruth for twice the value of such news as I have for you," returned Zuelo, calmly. "I know that Florose Earncliffe lives!"

"In the name of Heaven!—if it be true—if the dead can arise from the grave and return to life—tell me! tell me! where is she? Where did you learn such an impossible thing?"

And the mouth of the amaze-drawn face in the ventilator yawned as its owner thought:

"Florose Earncliffe alive! It is a joke! I will not believe it! My father furnished the poison for the rose that killed this Florose! Then how can she be alive?—after I read of her burial, too! How could she crawl through her coffin, and get out of the vault, when she was dead, and her soul sent to heaven by a well-paid priest? Malediction! I will not believe it!"

Zetta was half inclined to the opinion that her mistress raved; that the revelations of the night had affected her mind and caused delirium.

But Zuelo's glance was clear and bright; and still she smiled.

She had made a discovery. And that discovery, she knew by what she had so lately heard, would be productive of ineffable joy to Dwyr Allison, who had so long mourned the loss of his beloved Florose—and who, with the reader of our story, had every reason to believe that she had been in her grave for fifteen years.

"I cannot tell you where she is; but here"—fully partaking of the happiness she was about to bestow, through being the cause of that happiness—"here is where I found the news!"

She held aloft a short, slim, narrow envelope, which she drew from her bosom.

"It is a letter signed by one named Carlos Mendoza, and it will tell you that your Florose lives. It will tell you why and how it was that she did not sleep forever in her grave. I found it in the box containing the Star of Diamonds. The box has a false bottom. When I left you, to-night—after you, Mr. Allison, as Gaeol, brought me the star from the pawnbroker's—for the purpose of attiring myself in these green clothes, then it was I discovered, by chance, the secret receptacle; and in it was this letter, which I have read. It is yours."

Dwyr snatched the envelope from her, almost rudely. It was a powerful excitement which then worked upon him, for

his face was white even to ghastliness as he had anticipated the contents of the strangely-found letter; and his heart was pulsing in great throbs.

"Malediction!" snarled Cortez, under his breath, "that letter has been in that box for fifteen years. It was in it when my father sent the star to me, by Farak, in my prison cell! It was intended for me! If Florose Earncliffe is alive, it will explain how she came out of her coffin and out of the tomb! Now, what can be in that wonderful letter? Why did not I—blind dog!—find that letter? And how did Zuelo get hold of the star? *Caramba!*"

The letter which Zuelo had, by accident, found in the secret compartment of the box containing the Star of Diamonds, was addressed by Carlos Mendoza to his son, Cortez, it being therefore apparent that the Quack had intended it for Cortez.

Carlos, as we have stated, died in a fit. This fit came on him at the moment when he handed the box to Farak, with instructions regarding it; and the suddenness of his death had prevented his acquainting the negro with the fact that, beneath the star, under a cleverly-contrived false bottom, there was a letter which would explain something concerning the past life of Helene Cerey.

As it was, the letter had remained undiscovered until, by chance, Zuelo had penetrated the concealment of the important mis- sive.

And this is what was written on the sheet which Dwyr Allison unfolded with trembling fingers—lines that made him pale and flush, by turns, as he read them aloud:

"MY DEAR BOY! MY DEAR CORTÉZ!

"I am about to die. I have something to tell you that is singular—a secret for which there is one, at least, who would be willing to give a great deal; that is, if he was only alive—only alive! You know that Helene Cerey procured a poison of me to remove Florose Earncliffe, her rival. You know that this Florose was buried in the family vault. The world believed her dead. But it was not so! I did not furnish the stuff this beautiful belle desired. I deceived her. I gave her a certain drug to be administered through inhalation, and which would produce a state of coma, a sort of catalepsy indistinguishable from death itself. This drug was administered to Florose, and she was pronounced, by an ass of a physician, to be dead.

"On the night of her burial I went to the vault, and, with the aid of two well-paid rascals, I stole Florose, coffin and all! The most singular part is, that the coffin never has been missed from its shelf. Taking the inanimate body to a house which I rented for the purpose, I restored the girl to life; and she was grateful to me, her preserver. But, I made her no charge for all this; I had been well paid by the woman whose designs I was thwarting. I told Florose all. I also wrote for her documents strong enough to convict the beautiful belle, on condition that they should only be used after my death—for I felt then that I could not live long.

"When she learned that her father had died, and that she was really alone in the world, she turned to me for advice. At her earnest request I endeavored to find Dwyr Allison—or pretended to, for I knew that you, Cortez, had killed him—or, if you had not killed him, then some one finished the work for you, as he was never seen in New Orleans after the night when you stabbed him.

"I invented a story telling her he had gone half-wild and disappeared mysteriously for parts unknown. She gave him up as lost to her forever. Then I advised her to disguise herself and hunt down Helene Cerey who still lived in her fine house, in imagined security—but I made her promise again not to use the documents I had given her until she had heard of my death. I coun- seled that, to wreak vengeance on her would- be destroyer, it would be best for no one to know of her rising from the grave, until the time arrived when she was to strike her enemy.

"She tinged her skin, by dyes which I compounded; changed the color of her beau- tiful blonde hair to a hue of black, and made other alterations which would admi- rably cover her true identity. Then she asked me who she should say she was, in

case of question. I told her I had once brought over a little girl from London, who, if she had lived, would be about her own age. I had taken her from the deathbed of her mother. The mother had been secretly married; the father had perished at sea. I had some acquaintance with the woman, and consented to place the child in some institu- tion where she would be cared for.

"Coming to America, I put the child in the Orphan Girls' Asylum, in New Orleans. She ran away from the haven at the age of fourteen years, and joined a gang of thieves, by whom she was called Rosella. Her mother's name was Cylycyr—and I had called the girl Eloise Cylycyr! As Rosella she was subsequently arrested and tried on the charge of having assisted in robbing the house of Elsor Earncliffe. But she escaped punish- ment, and immediately after her release com- mitted suicide. In any other city than New Orleans she might have used this informa- tion advantageously.

"Thus provided with a bogus history of herself, Florose Earncliffe left the house, to watch Helene Cerey and wait for the mo- ment when my death should empower her to act. I then lost sight of her. But Florose Earncliffe lives, my boy, and the information may serve you.

"CARLOS MENDOZA."

The letter was without date

When he finished reading, Dwyr Allison uttered a low cry and clapped his hands to his eyes, while the paper fluttered down to the carpet.

His brain was swimming, his senses whirl- ed in an indefinable excitement.

"She lives! She lives!" he gasped, in broken, tumultuous accents. "Oh, God! I thank Thee!"

"*Caramba!*—yes, she must be alive!" ex- claimed the astounded Cortez.

At that juncture a figure stood in the door- way.

It was the small, thin man with gray eyes and this man was Dwyr Allison's valet, who had assisted in haunting Cortez Mendoza for fifteen years; and it was owing to this valet's shrewdness that the Spaniard did not escape the Green Shadow, through the seeming con- venience of the affair at the wine-shop in New Orleans, about, or somewhere about, a month prior to the date of this eventful night.

"Malediction!" rose to the lips of Cortez at sight of this personage; "it is the small man who wears a cap! I will shoot him!"

But he lowered the pistol, and listened to hear what further might pass.

Dwyr Allison was some moments in recov- ering from the effects produced by the joy- ous intelligence of the letter.

When he was again himself, he made known to his valet all that we have laid be- fore the reader.

"I want you, Cheviq," Dwyr said, "to go with Zuelo to-morrow night to Lynchburg. These witnesses to the confession of Sanzo Romero must be found—if such persons do exist."

"I will go, Mr. Allison. And you say you have captured this villain at last?"

"Yes, Cheviq, at last."

"Where is he?"

"Safe in there."

Allison pointed toward the closet.

And the face that had been glaring through the ventilator suddenly vanished as the valet glanced in that direction.

Zuelo and Zetta shortly retired.

It lacked but an hour or so to daybreak.

Trying the closet door to make sure of its security, Allison and his valet also withdrew to get some sleep.

But the young man could not rest. His mind was too turbulent with anticipations to permit of repose; and the remainder of the night was passed in thinking of his loved Florose.

Cortez Mendoza was not disturbed during the following day.

Zetta brought him his meals, which, with the aid of a chair, she passed through the ventilator.

The Spaniard had not, by any means lost his appetite.

"How long will you keep me in this devil- ish box?" he snarled when he received the small waiter containing his supper.

"Until we find the witnesses to the con- fession of Sanzo Romero," replied the serving- woman, leaving the room.

"*Caramba!* we'll see about that!"

Cortez chuckled.

"I'll be out of here sooner than you im- agine—death catch you!"

All through the afternoon he had been hard at work.

The lock of the closet door was on the in- side. To effect his escape it was only requi- site to remove the lock—and this fact seemed to have been overlooked by his cap- tors.

Using the large blade of his pen-knife, he soon drew out the screws; and toward eve- ning, when the question and answer above quoted passed between the Spaniard and the serving-woman, he was only waiting until it should grow a little darker, when he would make an effort toward his liberty.

When twilight was dimming into night, he heard his jailers conversing, as he judged, in the parlor below.

Pushing open the closet door, he tiptoed out. He carried his pistol cocked and ready, and looked savagely desperate as he mut- tered:

"If they intercept me now somebody will be shot! *Caramba!* Cortez Mendoza is no longer a prisoner! And if they want to try it, they can feel my claws—the claws of a panther, with the bite of a wolf!"

He stole along the entry, and down the stairs.

To escape by the front door he must pass the parlor; and to do the last would inevita- bly result in discovery.

"Malediction! I will go out by the house of the tigress!" and he continued on down to the kitchen.

But, Cortez was not yet free.

Cheviq and Zuelo were about to depart on their errand to Lynchburg, and, before go- ing, they desired to have a word with the Spaniard.

Cortez had scarce disappeared from the hallway when Allison, Cheviq, Zuelo and Zetta came out of the parlor and repaired to the large room in the second story.

At one glance they saw all. The prisoner was gone.

"To the roof, Cheviq!—to the roof!" cried Allison. "He has gone that way!"

Cheviq shot away, swift as a meteor, toward the roof of the house.

With great bounds Dwyr made for the cel- lar. He felt assured that the exit used by Cortez was either the roof or the cellar.

And Cortez had hardly gained the roof of Helene Cerey's house when Dwyr was in hot pursuit of him.

As the Spaniard crawled through the hole in the cellar wall his hand encountered something which twirled around with a scrape.

"*Caramba!* I have my pistol again—I have two pistols!" he exclaimed, as he snatched at the article.

Then, with a pistol in each hand—with Dwyr Allison close at his heels—he leaped ahead in the gloom.

He heard some one in his rear, and dis- charged one of the weapons at random behind him as he fled.

But the bullet did no harm.

"I will have my revenge on Helene Cerey, the tigress!" he growled savagely, and hur- ried on until he reached the beauty's bou- doir, as at the conclusion of a previous chapter.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CRASH! CRASH!

As Cortez Mendoza appeared before Helene Cerey and her maid with the sudden- ness and wildness of front we have set forth, the first uttered a cry of surprise and anger, and Eloise shrunk backward with a glance of fear at the intruder.

Helene's dagger flashed in her hand on the instant, and her eyes glittered as they re- turned the glaring stare of the Spaniard.

Cortez, when he bounded in, had rushed to that side of the room directly opposite the door; and his enemy, the tigress, was smiling in a strange, ironical, dangerous way. He noted that he stood within a few feet of the large chair, in which

Eloise made a captive by way of experiment.

"So, Cortez Mendoza, you are not yet gone!" she hissed, while the ominous glistening of her dark orbs grew intense.

At the same moment she began to draw slowly nearer and nearer to him.

"Yes—*caramba!* I am here!" he roared. "And I am here for revenge! You will not marry me—you will not give me half your fortune—then I will have your life! Do you hear that, tigress?—your life! Ha! keep out, you dog!" the last as he saw Cheviq—the small man, with gray eyes—start up amid the plants on the balcony.

The valet dodged out of sight as a pistol aimed at him.

"You are a coward and an assassin, Cortez Mendoza!" taunted the beauty. "I do not fear you. I will have your life!"

A terrible fire was consuming the spirit of the woman. Her lovely face was glowing scarlet, and her eyes burned like tiny coals. All the deadly hate of her nature was tumbling beneath her heaving bosom; and, bold, fearless, threatening, she still glided nearer and nearer, twining her jeweled fingers rigidly around the hilt of her weapon.

"Malediction!—stand still there, or you die!" Cortez ground out between his teeth. "First I will laugh at you for failing to destroy me in the past, and then I will bore your head with a bullet—you tigress!"

He raised one pistol to a level with her forehead. But he did not pull the trigger.

Though himself under the influence of fiercest passion, he saw, by the contortions of Helene's beautiful, but now demon-like face, that she was deaf to warning. He saw that she was crazed by a frenzy, wild and reckless, only bent on his destruction, without concern for possible injury to herself.

And he hesitated.

"First I will kill you, and then your sister!" said the beautiful fiend, still slowly advancing.

"My sister?"

"Yes—yes!" nodding her head jerkingly.

"But, you first!"

"I have no sister! *Caramba!*—tigress and crazy woman! keep off, or I fire!"

"There is your sister—there! She dies, too!"

Helene pointed to the shrinking, terrified maid; but she did not remove her fixed stare into the gleaming eyes of Cortez.

"You lie! I never had a sister!" snarled he, and then, with a sudden thought:

"That woman is Florose Earncliffe!"

"Florose Earncliffe!" echoed from her lips as she started and wheeled upon Eloise.

But the maid just then uttered a loud shriek, one that combined an accent of joy in its terror.

She had seen Dwyer Allison standing at the door.

In a moment she had bounded past Helene, ere the knife that was raised to strike her could descend; and in another moment she was clasped to the young man's breast.

It was Florose. He recognized her, and the long-separated lovers were thus reunited.

Defeated here, Helene turned, and, with a spring as quick and agile as that of a panther, threw herself upon Cortez Mendoza.

He was taken totally unawares, and, as he tripped, her weight bore him backward into the large chair.

Ere he could comprehend his great peril, she had touched the spring that worked the infernal contrivance, and Cortez was writhing and howling in utter helplessness.

The pistols had been knocked from his grasp by the action of the bands that shot around from the back of the chair.

Picking up one of these, she laughed at his discomfiture, and sent a triumphant taunt piercing through his ears.

At one sweep of her hand, the lamp went whirling from the table; and as it struck it exploded, darting little rivulets of flame in every direction.

"Ha, there! tigress! fiend! devil! let me loose!" bellowed Cortez, straining and struggling till the veins stood out upon his forehead.

But Helene only answered with a demon-

ic smile, as she caught the cape of her dress, she

wound it round and round the Spaniard's head to stifle his cries.

Cheviq essayed to enter from the balcony, and Dwyer, Zetta, Zuelo and Florose, who were in the entry, would have rushed in to prevent the red tableau which was about to be enacted.

But Helene retired to a corner, and, with the pistol, kept them at bay.

"Come on! Come on, and rescue him!" she screamed. "And the first who enters, dies! Ha! ha! ha! I will have my revenge on Cortez Mendoza!"

The fire spread about with wonderful rapidity. Floor, carpeting, furniture, curtains, window-frame, soon all were ignited and crackling, and the hissing of the havoc-ing flames grew louder as they closed around the mad woman and her helpless victim.

Cheviq was forced from the balcony by the intense heat.

Through the door, out into the hall, poured the raging tongues, compelling the witnesses there congregated to fly.

Helene threw open the door of the room adjoining, darting hither and thither with blazing clothes—and in a moment volumes of smoke and fire were surging against the panes of the windows with a sullen sound.

Presently, with a report, a crash, a jingle of falling glass, the scorching, glowing, snake tongues burst forth, front and back.

The building was like a burning palace; and from the red windows rolled out and up the spiral columns of black, smothering smoke.

A figure waving a blazing brand moved from point to point in the lower story, and the apartments below, like those above, were soon hopelessly enveloped by the devouring element.

From roof to cellar roared the monstrous, fiery sheets!

The alarm had sounded. Engines were tearing through the streets, and the wild, hoarse shouts of the gathering multitude rose upon the early evening air.

But the edifice was lost! The gallant firemen could only try to save the houses adjoining; and even these were beginning to blister and smoke dangerously.

Column after column of sparks, like a tower-abode of fiends, rose higher and higher, seeming to grow denser as the streams of water played upon the glowing oven!

Then the roof sunk down, and the bare, supportless walls, with their sashless windows, tottered threateningly.

But an awful cry went up from the throats of lookers-on!

Astraddle of the swaying wall was the form of a man, who was clinging tenaciously to the hot bricks.

A few feet from him, approaching him inch by inch on hands and knees, was another form; and, as the light of the shooting flames shone upon his face, they saw that the would-be-rescuer was a negro. His clothes were already nearly burned from off his body, and they could see the black pate glistening where the fire had licked off the crisp wool.

Like a demon he looked as he slowly made his way toward the unfortunate being who clung to the wall.

It was Farak! The man astraddle of the wall was Cortez Mendoza!

The African had nearly reached his master when there was a dull, snapping sound, that caused a murmur of horror among the gazing people—then the high wall fell inward with a crash like a thunder-peal.

Two loud, piercing shrieks of despair and agony rung out from the fiery maelstrom!

Helene Cercy did not perish. At the last moment she ran to the balcony and leaped—a fearful leap—to the ground below. She fled and lived.

But we have done with her career.

Dwyer Allison and his loved Florose, so strangely reunited, are now married, and live in New Orleans. They are happy.

Zuelo and Zetta no longer reside in America—and the beautiful young girl still keeps and guards the Star of Diamonds, in fulfillment of her promise to her dying mother.

Our tale is told!

THE END.

BEADLE'S DIME DIALOGUES.

Dime Dialogues, No. 35.

In the Wrong House. For 2 males and 2 females.
The Sham of It All. For 3 females and 1 male.
The Surest Proof. For several males and one female.
Too Much for Jones and Smith. For two males.
Naughty Boy Blue. For Mother Goose and several children.
Only a Working Girl. For 4 females and 2 males.
How He Got Even with His Enemy. For two males.
Mrs. Bigson's Victory. For one male and one female.
The Mysterious Boarder. For 3 females and 2 males.
The Mugwump Sisters. For a number of females.
Dolly Madison's Method. For 2 males and 1 female.
Miss Lighthouse in the Country. For one male and one female.
The Cruel King. For seven little boys.
Shoddy and Wool. For five males and six females.
The Best Profession of All. For four little girls and one grown person.
Florence Elton's Mistake. For 2 males and 1 female.
The Bewitched Music-Box. For two males.

Dime Dialogues, No. 36.

The King Discrowned. For an entire school.
Meeting of the Bulgertown Philomalian Literary Society. For five or more males, and three females.
Wise and Otherwise. For six little boys.
Moonshine. A Jingle. For six little girls.
Beware of Mr. Oily Gammon. For four males.
Sarah Hannah. For four females.
The Cowboy Cousin. For 2 males and 2 females.
The Proverb Children. For six little girls.
The Happiest Man in the Country. For two males and two females.
The Repudiated Legacy. For two females.
Prof. Pachyderm's Mastodon. For four males.
The Too Good-looking Man. For 3 males & 2 females.
How Caesar Conquered. For 1 female, 5 males and a "ghost."
Spoons as an Intercessor. For three females.
How Wiggins Was Cured. For four males.

Dime Dialogues, No. 37.

The Fairies' Prisoner. A Scenic and Dress Piece for a Young Ladies' School, or Garden Party, or Parlor Entertainment.
The McFlackertys and McDoozers. For two males and three females.
The Children of the Week. For seven little girls.
Uncle Raspy's Ruse. For one male and four females.
The Land of "On-e-on-a-Time." For 7 little boys.
Jupiter Johnson's Affairs. For one male and one female and one outsider.
The Bore of a Day. For four males and six females.
Rather Mixed. For a number of small girls.
The Old Irish Tay. For several males and two females.
Cherubino and Seraphina. For 1 male and 1 female.
The Comic Valentine. For four boys and teacher.
The Two Roberts. For five males and one female.
Keeping Bachelor's Hall. For several males and one female.
Four Wishes. For four little girls.
Things Are Seldom What They Seem. For two males and two females.
The Charity Student. For several girls.
A Catch at Last. For three males and one female.
The Bogus Doctor. For four males and a ghost.
Preparing for an Exhibition. For teacher and three children.

Dime Dialogues, No. 38.

A Wild Irishman's Diplomacy. For five males and four females.
Aunt Deborah in the City. For two females.
A Chinaman in Camp. For three males.
Playing Hostess. For two ladies and a little girl.
Slightly Hilarious. For four males.
What Happened to Hannah. For two males and one female.
The Awakening of the Flowers. For a girls' school.
Plato Pendexter's Ashes. For four females and two males.
The Spirit of Discontent. For nine little boys.
The Good Strikers. For six little girls.
The Missing Essay. For a number of girls and teacher.
The Well Taught Lesson. For several boys.
Ephraim Black's Politics. For several males and one female.
The Strike That Failed. For three boys.

Dime Dialogues, No. 39.

Hospitality. For three males and two females.
Robert's Experiment. For two males and two females.
Quite Another State of Affairs. For five males.
A Flowery Conference. For several little girls and boys.
Slightly Mixed. For three acting characters and children.
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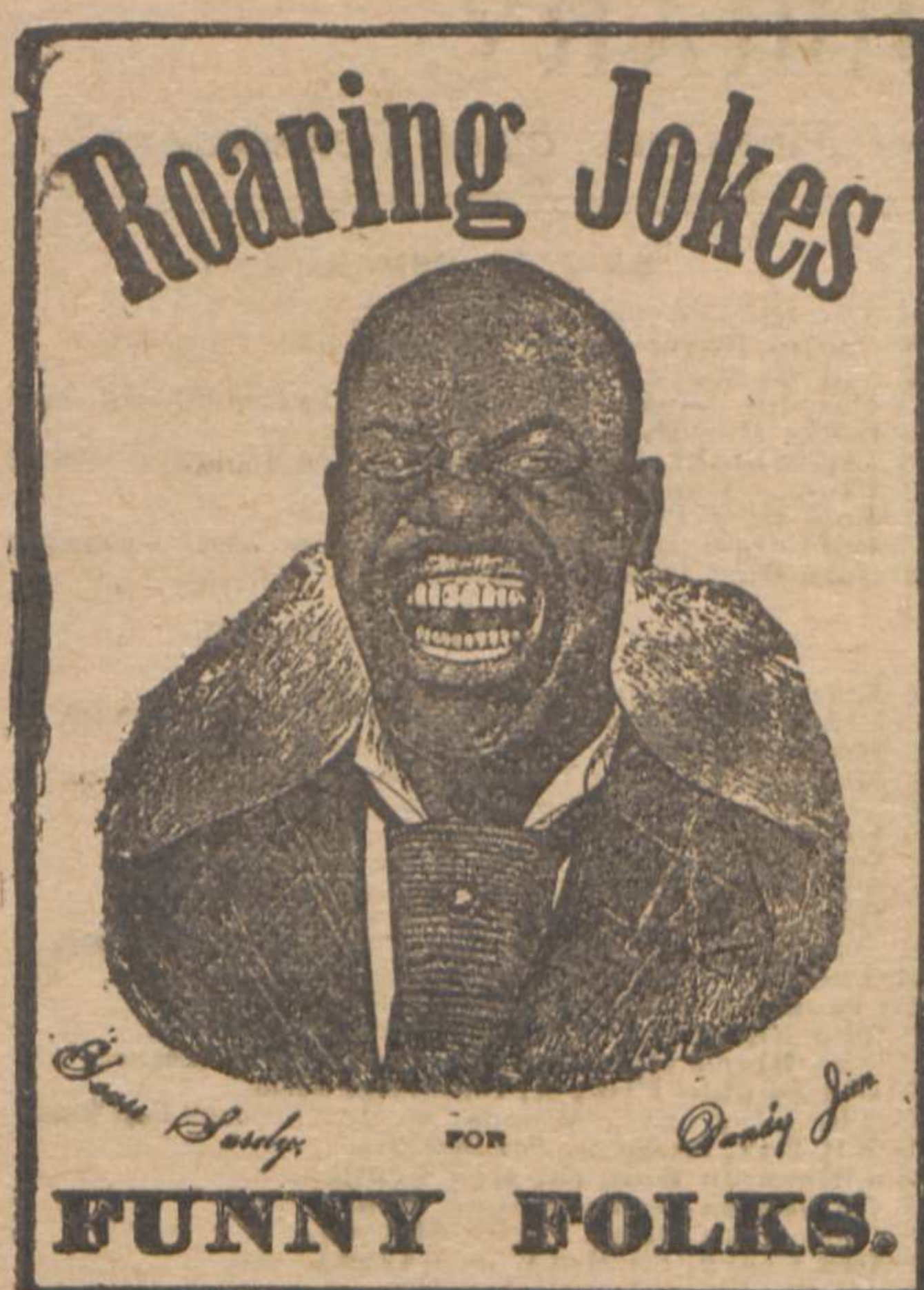
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